

Revelation: How to live through the end of the world

Part 5: How the world REALLY 'Ends'

Revelation 8, 14, 19, 21, and 22

Summary: Is the world really going to end in fire and fear—or is Revelation actually a message of justice, hope, and the ultimate victory of Jesus over evil?

Main Ideas:

Revelation is often used to scare people into complying.

Revelation shows us the “end of the world” is actually good news.

In his love and justice, God will ultimately judge and destroy evil.

The judgments of Revelation are God’s answer to the evil in the world.

The depiction of God’s judgment is meant to give hope, not create fear.

Through his death and resurrection, the Lamb completely wipes out all evil

New Jerusalem is God living with his people in his kingdom forever.

In the end, love and justice win.

Revelation isn’t the story of the end of the world. It’s the story of the beginning of our forever world.

Invitation:

Ask: How can I bring New Jerusalem to my world now?

Then do something!

Discussion Questions:

1. What were you taught or believed growing up about how the world would end? How did it affect you emotionally or spiritually?
2. Read Revelation 21:1-7, 22-27, and 22:1-5. What stands out to you in these descriptions of the New Jerusalem?
3. Revelation ends not with destruction but with *renewal*. How could that vision reshape the way we think about God’s plan for the world?
4. What’s one practical way you can bring “New Jerusalem” into your world this week?
5. How can your group pray with you this week?

Transcript:

ME: How is the world going to end?

As a kid, I remember people coming to my Xian school and telling me this was how the world was going to end, likely in the next 20 years...

Rev. 8:6-13 *Then the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared to blow their mighty blasts. The first angel blew his trumpet, and hail and fire mixed with blood were thrown down on the earth. One-third of the earth was set on fire, one-third of the trees were burned, and all the green grass was burned. Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and a great mountain of fire was thrown into the sea. One-third of the water in the sea became blood, one-third of all things living in the sea died, and one-third of all the ships on the sea were destroyed. Then the third angel blew his trumpet,*

and a great star fell from the sky, burning like a torch. It fell on one-third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star was Bitterness. It made one-third of the water bitter, and many people died from drinking the bitter water. Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and one-third of the sun was struck, and one-third of the moon, and one-third of the stars, and they became dark. And one-third of the day was dark, and also one-third of the night. Then I looked, and I heard a single eagle crying loudly as it flew through the air, "Terror, terror, terror to all who belong to this world because of what will happen when the last three angels blow their trumpets."

We were told we better accept Jesus so we could be raptured to heaven before all these things would happen to us.

I don't know about you, but that's a pretty messed up way to get kids to follow Jesus.

WE: But more often than not, that's how the book of Revelation has been used, on kids and adults.

Revelation is often used to scare people into complying.

This image of the "Apocalypse" has captured our culture's imagination... It's made people a lot of money with books and movies.

People have made careers, built churches, and even whole church denominations on doing "prophecy updates"...

- When are these things going to happen?
- Well, this one thing happened in Israel, so get ready for the rapture (something not even mentioned in REV.) b/c the world is about to burn.
- And sometimes, there's an underlying glee that our neighbors are going to burn since they didn't believe the right things.

Some Xians define what type of Xian you are based on if you think God will rescue Xians before, during, or after these things happen.

But what if all of the hysteria, speculation, and fearmongering is missing the entire point of why the author John wrote Revelation?

What if these images in Revelation mean something different, something more, and something better than just that the world is going to burn someday... and make sure you're not left behind?

What if, instead of describing God throwing a sadistic, cosmic temper tantrum, these images show his love and justice?

What if the end times don't end the world in fire but restore, renew, and reimagine the world?

What if instead of being a scary book to frighten children...

Revelation shows us the "end of the world" is actually good news.

GOD: So let me ask you... have you ever looked at the horrible events in the world or experienced some kind of injustice and thought...

- Why doesn't God do something about this?
- If there is a God, why does he allow so much evil to go unpunished?

If so, you're in good company... the same question is asked in REV.

Rev. 6:9-10 *When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony. They shouted to the Lord and said, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?"*

There is pain and injustice everywhere.

Revelation shows us it's the result, as we've seen in previous messages, of the dragon, the beasts, and Babylon.

The dragon (Satan) hates God and creation and especially the people of God

He gives power to leaders and empires in every time period (The beasts)

And together, throughout the history of humankind, they create Babylon(s)...

For John, Babylon was the Roman empire and its culture of self-glorifying idolatry, immorality, and violence.

- But Babylon represents any empire or culture in opposition to the Lamb (Jesus), his way, and his people
- Any system where greed, injustice, and power dominate over love and humility.

Babylon targets, oppresses, and even kills those who pledge their allegiance to the Lamb and his Way.

As REV starts, Jesus tells his followers to join the fight and resist Babylon.

- By living lives of love and worship to and about the Lamb.

But are the JF's on their own? Do they have to keep resisting and fighting and being persecuted and even killed forever?

Is God ever going to stop the dragon, the beasts, and Babylon?

Yes. He is!

And that's when, in graphic and dramatic detail, the author John shows us that...

- In his love and justice, God will ultimately judge and destroy evil.

Rev. 8:3-5 *Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great amount of incense was given to him to mix with the prayers of God's people as an offering on the gold altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of God's holy people, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out. Then the angel filled the incense burner with fire from the altar and threw it down upon the earth; and thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and there was a terrible earthquake.*

The fire being thrown down is God's response to the people's prayers.

The judgments of Revelation are God's answer to the evil in the world.

John describes 3 sets of 7 judgments

- 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 shallow bowls that all bring judgments to the world.
- 7 = perfection
- 3 = the greatest or ultimate expression of something

Meaning, what is being described/explained is the complete, perfect erasure of evil

As you saw in the passage I read as we began... The descriptions of these judgments are extreme stuff of nightmares.

- Huge locusts torturing people with stings like scorpions,
- 75 lb hailstones falling on people,
- Seas and rivers turning into blood,

So what's going on?

While some people interpret these events literally, Revelation is written in apocalyptic imagery, much like the OT writings of Daniel/Ezekiel.

Apocalyptic writing was a type of genre that we don't have in our culture.

- It used numbers and symbols to explain deeper truths.
- In fact, Apocalypse in the original Greek doesn't mean catastrophe or end of the world... it means unveiling or REVELATION.

John likely intended his readers to understand these as symbols of God's confrontation with evil, not headlines of future events.

This is traditional apocalyptic language for divine judgment against oppressive political systems.

- It's a symbolic style of writing describing God's wrath being poured out on the powers and systems that have abused, oppressed, and killed his people.
- John uses images from Israel's past (like the Exodus and the prophet Daniel) to describe God eliminating evil to rescue his people.

The depiction of God's judgment is meant to give hope, not create fear.

- The dragon, beasts, and Babylon will be judged and destroyed.

But these judgments aren't chronological events, telling us in precise detail how the world will end.

- "First this, then that will happen, then that will happen."

These 3 sets of 7 show the reality of God's complete and perfect judgment from different angles...

It's helpful to think of these musically, not linearly... Theologian NT Wright put it this way...

N.T. Wright: *This is one of the differences between writing something with words and writing it with music. In music, you can have several lines which all happen at the same time; but with words you have to say everything in sequence. This sevenfold sequence is not chronological. It is an exposition of a sevenfold reality.*

But there is an urgency in these depictions that implores the readers to reject Babylon and follow the way of the Lamb b/c nothing will stop God's perfect plan of redemption from unfolding.

- Come out of Babylon, pledge allegiance to the Lamb b/c nothing can stop God's liberation and salvation of his people.

Throughout these scenes, God is giving people chance after chance to turn from Babylon and their idolatry and follow the Lamb.

Rev. 14:6-7 *And I saw another angel flying through the sky, carrying the eternal Good News to proclaim to the people who belong to this world—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. "Fear God," he shouted. "Give glory to him. For the time has come when he will sit as judge. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water."*

The dragon, beasts, and Babylon have opposed God's kingdom long enough...

- As the story comes to a dramatic climax...
- The armies of the dragon assemble to fight against God (in a place called Armageddon)...
- And in response, we get one of the strangest and, for some, disturbing and misunderstood images of Jesus...

Rev. 19:11-21. *Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.*

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, shouting to the vultures flying high in the sky: "Come! Gather together for the great banquet God has prepared. Come and eat the flesh of kings, generals, and strong warriors; of horses and their riders; and of all humanity, both free and slave, small and great."

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the world and their armies gathered together to fight against the one sitting on the horse and his army. And the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who did mighty miracles on behalf of the beast—miracles that deceived all who had accepted the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue. Both the beast and his false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Their entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came from the mouth of the one riding the white horse. And the vultures all gorged themselves on the dead bodies.

Often, this is interpreted as there is going to be a literal future battle where Jesus comes and slaughters everyone who doesn't follow him.

But when you look at what's written and give it some thought, that interpretation doesn't really make sense.

First, why would Jesus need to do anything to slaughter people?

- He spoke the world into existence... he could speak them out of existence.

2nd, it says “from his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations” and “the entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came out of his mouth.”

What? Jesus kills them by licking them with his sword tongue?

- No, It's a symbol...
- This isn't describing the violence of a battle... it's divine judgment through truth.
- The sword of his mouth represents the power of his truth to expose and destroy evil.
- He judges in righteousness and truth, not in ruthless violence.

Finally, His robe is dipped in blood... before any battle takes place... so whose blood is it?

- It's his.
- The rider is also the Lamb that was slaughtered

What REV shows us over and over is... Through his death and resurrection, the Lamb completely wipes out all evil

The dragon and the beasts are thrown into a lake of fire...

- Along with them, anyone who followed them
- Finally, death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire.

Jesus utterly destroys the dragon, the beasts, and their empire of Babylon... and then death itself.

And in Babylon's place, he brings the culmination of the entire story of the Bible and the history of humanity... New Jerusalem.

Rev. 21:1-7 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children."

New Jerusalem is the exact opposite of Babylon.

- While Babylon is the great prostitute, full of demons. A murderous culture of death.
- New Jerusalem is the bride of the Lamb, full of the presence of God; it provides healing and has no pain, tears, or death. It is a culture of life.

This isn't about escaping the evil world and going to heaven.

In the end, evil, greed, and injustice are judged, condemned, and destroyed.

And the world isn't destroyed... all of creation is renewed and remade

New Jerusalem is God living with his people in his kingdom forever.

John is showing his readers... that even though things seem desperate right now, even though it seems like evil is winning, that the empire is too powerful, that might seems to always make right...

Evil's days are numbered, and the future is infinitely better and more real than what we are going through right now.

Listen... Babylon will fall, the dragon and his beasts will fall, injustice will fall, greed will fall, death will fall.

But the Lamb has risen, and he has already won... Celebrate that next week!

The story of God, as told in the scriptures, is completed here at the end of Revelation.

The story begins in a perfect garden where humanity experiences God face-to-face every day...

This garden is lost as humanity believes the lies of the dragon.

- Rebelling against God and trying to create a world/life apart from him.

But he comes and rescues humanity from their rebellion...

- He shows us the power of his love; he dies and rises again for us...

And invites us to join his kingdom now as we wait for him to eradicate the dragon and evil once and for all.

This is the kingdom Jesus inaugurated through his life, death, and resurrection.

- This is the kingdom we experience in glimpses now when we enjoy and worship God and unconditionally love each other.
- When Jesus destroys the dragon, the beasts, and Babylon it will finally and fully be here forever.

In the end, love and justice win.

YOU: See, Revelation wasn't written to scare us.

It was written to show us how to be people of courage, hope, and love as we live in Babylon while being loyal to the Lamb now.

The point isn't that we need to be stockpiling supplies, decoding bloodmoons, or waiting for some rapture to save us from a doomed world.

The point is... we are in a battle with evil, but Jesus has already won.

- And we are called to enjoy his victory by following him with our whole lives as we look forward to the final culmination of his kingdom coming to earth once and for all.

Every single one of us is invited to join the Lamb... **Rev 22:17** *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Let anyone who hears this say, "Come." Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life*

Are you thirsty?

Do you crave true justice and peace?

Are you tired of the greed, violence, and lies of the systems of the world? Are you tired of Babylon?

Do you want hope instead of fear? Healing instead of hurt? Life instead of merely existing?

Then you are invited to come to the Lamb and pledge your allegiance to him.

The story of the universe is that God is inviting all of us into his New Jerusalem.

Inviting us to enter the true story all around us and join him in his mission to redeem all of creation.

He is calling each of us into his kingdom now and forever...

To join, simply tell him you choose him.

- "Jesus, I want to follow you. I want to drink the water of life. I choose to join your kingdom."

And this week, and beyond, let's enjoy living for the Lamb and rebel against Babylon wherever we find it... not just by believing something but by doing something...

Ask: How can I bring New Jerusalem to my world now?

- Where can I bring healing?
- Where can I bring hope?
- Where can I bring justice?
- How can I encourage/serve/love?
- How can I join with others to bring light into the darkness?

Then do something!

- What passion has God put on your heart? Explore it.
- A good example is serving here on Sundays, as we create a community that invites our neighbors to discover, enjoy, and share the life Jesus offers... together

WE: In Revelation, the curtain is pulled back, and we see there is a real war between good and evil being waged right now.

- And we are part of it whether we know it or not.

The world as we know it, full of hurt, pain, selfishness, and injustice, is going to end.

And when that happens, everything will be remade the way it is supposed to be.

- We will enjoy the presence of God for eternity.

An eternity of true love, true peace, and true life.

- As we discover more and more of God and his love, the longer we are with him
- Where the pains of this life will only serve to remind us how wonderful our new/real life is.
- Where we can begin to live life the way it was always meant to be with the Lamb and each other forever.

See, [Revelation isn't the story of the end of the world. It's the story of the beginning of our forever world.](#)

CS Lewis- The Last Battle.

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page; now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever; which every chapter is better than the one before.