The Maranatha Message — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 1:3; overview of Revelation 1–18 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, July 24, 2022 · *Mystery Babylon*

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But if you will take your Bible, we're going to be in the book of Revelation. You can turn there, Revelation chapter one. If you're new to our church, then you need to know we typically preach through books of the Bible in our church and we've been in this last book of the Bible for right over a year now and last week we finished a series on Revelation chapter 17 and 18, which means we're almost done. We're like this close to being done. We're so close I can taste it. And I'm so happy because Revelation has been quite a chore to preach through.

But before we do that last sprint, I thought it would be helpful this morning to do something a little bit different, and that is I want to try to tie everything together that we've been looking at. So much of what we've been talking about over the last couple of months has been what most people think of when they think end times, when they think of the book of the Revelation. Even people who maybe don't have much familiarity with the Bible, when they hear the word apocalypse, they think, Oh, that's like end times, that's antichrist, that's mark of the beast, that's 666, that's Gog and Magog, that's Armageddon.

These kinds of words people have a loose familiarity with, and we have been exploring a lot of those themes, and it's been really interesting; it's been really fun. A lot of people go a lot deeper than we did. A lot of people go, to me, too far afield on some of these topics. But there's a tendency, I think, by all of us to get so fascinated by these topics that we miss the forest for the trees and we miss the main point of why the Bible even has prophecy in the first place.

Why does it give us these predictions about the end of the world and what it's going to look like and those types of things? And it's not so that we would obsess about who's the

antichrist. It's not so that we would obsess about the European Union and a ten-nation coalition and all of those things. In fact, Jesus, when he talks about those things— it's kind of interesting. He says his disciples should be aware of the signs of the times. And so there's nothing wrong with looking at all of that stuff and knowing about the signs of the times.

That's good, good, good. But he also says those things are birth pains. And it would be crazy for someone who was pregnant with a baby to overly obsess about the birth pains instead of the joy of bringing a new baby into the world. Could you imagine? Or maybe you were pregnant and all you could think about was the birth pains. Oh it's going to be so terrible. Any mamas do that? No, you're like, No, I got that. But if you were a husband and your wife was doing that, or your partner, you would say, You know, I don't know that's super healthy, to be overly focused on the birth pains when, you know, we are bringing a new child into this world.

He has a name, she has a name, we have a future, we have all this bedding picked out. We got this new, better reality that's coming into the world. And I think that's how we should think about eschatology, which is a big fancy word for the study of the end times. When we think about the book of the Revelation, we should know about the birth pains. We should know what we should expect. Explore all that stuff, but not get so consumed by it that we miss the main point. And that is that when Jesus comes, he is going to inaugurate something so much better than the world that we have today.

And that's what this study has been about. Jesus is coming again in glory and power to judge the world, and that when he comes, he will make all things new, new heavens, new earth, and a kingdom on the earth as it is in heaven. And so what I want us to do this morning is to take a jet tour through Revelation, hitting those mountain peaks that we've already visited. Tying together all of the big themes and really unearthing the main message of the book of the Revelation and how it applies to our life today.

To begin, I want to read Revelation chapter 1, verse 3, which is the Lord promising a blessing to everyone who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and those who hear it and keep what is written in it. So Revelation chapter 1, verse 3: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it," why? "Because the time is near." Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we thank you that you have given us a guide in the Holy Scriptures to know not just who you are and what you want from us, but also what the future holds.

Thank you that you did not leave us without any clue about how to navigate this crazy world. And so as we read this book, read it aloud, and as we hear it and seek to put it into practice, would you do what you've promised to do, and that is to bless us and enable us to walk in obedience to what you call us to do. And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. I think the easiest way to think about the book of the Revelation is to break it down into a set of sevens.

So to me the Revelation is a series of sets of seven. You've got Revelation opening with this vision of Jesus risen from the dead in all of this amazing glory and majesty. But immediately after that you've got seven letters written to seven different churches. Those seven letters to seven different churches are followed by another series of seven, and that is seven seals on a scroll that is in the right hand of God on the throne. Remember, Revelation is apocalyptic, so it's got all of these symbols and imagery. God's on the throne in heaven.

John sees him there with this big scroll, which many think is the plan of God for the end of days. Jesus is presented as one who takes the scroll and he begins to break the seals and there's seven seals. Those seven seals are then followed by another set of seven. Does anybody remember the third set of seven? Trumpets, there you go. She liked that trumpet sound, it's pretty good. Seven trumpets are then followed by the final set of seven. Does anybody remember those? The bowls. Alright, so you got seven letters to seven churches, seven seals on a big scroll.

That's the plan of God, seven trumpets of judgment, and then seven bowls of God's wrath. Think of those as like the four pillars, or the framework, for how the book of the Revelation plays itself out. It's talking about the end of days, talking about the judgment of God, the return of the king, and it lays itself out sequentially with those letters, seals, trumpets, and bowls. I want to look at each of those and try to elicit the main message because I think that's the whole point of the book of Revelation, not to get lost in the weeds, but to catch the main message.

The main message to me of Revelation chapter 2 and 3 is summed up in one word, and that's the word overcome. To each church Jesus writes a different letter, but in every different letter there's the same call at the very end. He says, to the one who overcomes, to the church that overcomes, I'm promising you a reward. Future focused hope is what enables these churches to repent of their sin and to trust Christ and persevere in obedience. It's really interesting. I have a little chart here of the seven different churches, and it's amazing how every time Jesus says, if you'll overcome, there's a reward, the reward looks different every single time just as the problems that these churches face are different every single time.

The church in Ephesus was a loveless church. They'd kind of gotten apathetic. They had disordered their love for God. They were just kind of going through the motions. He tells them to repent, recapture their first love, and if they overcome, they're going to eat from the tree of life. Talking about the Garden of Eden, a renewed Eden, renewed communion with God, were given to those who overcome. To the suffering church in Smyrna, many of them were losing their lives. He says if you'll overcome, you will not be harmed by the second death, the permanent death.

To the compromising church in Pergamum, he says, if you'll persevere, just like the Israelites[1] persevered in the wandering of the wilderness, I'm going to give you a hidden

manna and I'll give you a white stone with a new name on it. To the church in Thyatira, they were getting a little bit too tolerant with all kinds of nasty, crazy things going on in their church. He tells them to repent, to stop tolerating the evil, and that they would be given authority over the nations if they overcome. The dead church in Sardis: They thought they were alive.

They were arrogant, but they were actually spiritually dead. He says, if you'll repent, if you'll overcome, you're going to be given white clothes and a name forever written in the book of life, not a church of death, but the book of life. Finally, the faithful church is there in Philadelphia. They're doing most everything right. He says you need to persevere and overcome, and if you do, you will become a pillar in the temple of God and you'll be given a new name. And then finally Laodicea, the church that was neither hot nor cold.

They were lukewarm and apathetic. The Lord says, repent, overcome, and you will have the right to sit with Jesus Christ on his throne as he rules the nations. Seven different letters, seven different churches, seven different problems, seven different solutions, but the same promise given to every single one: if you will overcome, you will receive a reward. And so the message for us today, we're not those churches, but we are the church of God. We're a local church in God's family. The message to us is to persevere and to overcome, and that when we overcome, God has a reward.

So the church of Christ is called to overcome. Then in chapters 4 and 5, the Christ of the church is presented as the only one who is worthy. In fact, John is ushered up into heaven in chapter 4. He sees the throne room of God. He sees myriads of angels. He sees these 24 elders, these four living beasts; each of them represent a different thing. But the main point of chapters 4 and 5 is that God is worthy of worship. You see the Father presented as the creator. They sing to him in Revelation chapter 4, verse 11, "Our Lord and God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power."

Why? "Because you have created all things, and by your will they exist and were created." The camera zooms out in Revelation chapter 5; you see Jesus presented as the lion from the tribe of Judah, the lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world. And again, all of heaven bows in worship and they sing, You, Jesus, are worthy to take the scroll, and only you, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. They sing it again in chapter 5, verse 12: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

Seven different words talking about the completeness, the totality in which Jesus is worthy. And that worthy Christ at the end of chapter 5 enters into Revelation chapter 6, and he takes that scroll of God's final plan and he begins to break the seals. And every time Jesus breaks one of the seals, something happens on the earth. You see tribulation, you see pain. You see

a world in crisis and every seal escalates the difficulty. I got a little chart here for those of you who love charts. The first four of the seven seals is a series of horsemen.

They call them the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Maybe you've heard that before. The first is a white horse with a rider who had a bow, who goes out as a conqueror in order to conquer. I suggested this was a reference to that final end-times government, that final end-times antichrist who promises peace but doesn't deliver. Instead you see the red horse follow, who takes peace from the earth. He is given a sword; you have wars and rumors of wars. That's followed by the black horse who has a set of scales in his hand.

He inflicts economic harm on the earth through soaring inflation, insane amounts of money just for a piece of bread, insane amounts of money even for a cheap piece of bread. And then finally you have the green horse or the ashen horse, a gray color of death. He's given authority to kill one fourth of the earth through sword, famine, plague, and wild animals. And as he comes, you see an increase in persecution of the saints throughout the earth. It's exactly what Jesus said would happen. In fact if you go and read Revelation chapter 6 alongside of Matthew chapter 24.

It is unbelievable the parallels. Jesus says during the end of days there's going to be birth pains, and those birth pains are going to be false christs who promise peace. It's going to be wars and rumors of wars. You're going to see famine. You're going to see earthquakes. You're going to see all these different signs. And then there's going to come an incredible persecution, unlike the world has ever seen. Christians everywhere will be martyred and persecuted for their faith. And that's exactly what you see in the fifth seal. You see martyred souls, Christians who'd lost their life in obedience to Christ, crying out to God underneath the altar, how long, O Lord, until you come, how many more people have to die?

And they're told to wait just a little while longer. Then you see the answer to the question of how long is answered in the sixth seal, and that is not very long. Because in the sixth seal you see these cosmic signs and wonders. The sun turns black, the moon turns to blood, the earthquakes, the stars fall, the sky splits, mountains move. All the people of the earth, great and small, kings and peasants, they cry out, Who can survive? Who can stand? Here comes the wrath of the Lamb! And you see the judgment of God begin to take place on the earth and those judgments flesh themselves out with the seven trumpets.

Now what's the main point of all that? It would be so easy, so easy to get lost in the weeds and the horsemen and all the different things. The main message is that the days leading up to the second coming of Christ will be days similar to today in that they will be marked by tribulation. They will be marked by suffering. Those days, Jesus says, will be marked by a great tribulation, a kind of tribulation that is unparalleled to any day before that day. But if the people of God will persevere, if they will hold on, if they will maintain their faith in Jesus, when he comes, he will bring vindication.

And that's the point of the sixth and seventh seal and the trumpet and the bowl judgments. With the seals in view, let's look at the trumpets and the bowls very quickly, and then I want to make application to what all of this describes. This chart is so easy to be overwhelmed by, but the reason I put it all up there next to each other is because I want you to see the similarities between the trumpets and the bowls. Both of these things are just pictures. They're symbols of God's judgment on the earth.

And what you see happen is an escalation of intensity with each new judgment. For example, in the seal judgments, you saw that one fourth of the earth was killed, or they had authority to kill one fourth of the earth. When you get to the trumpets it escalates to one third. But then when you get to the bowls, it escalates even further to the fullness of the earth. And so if you're taking notes, the way I want you to think about the trumpets and the bowls is that the trumpets begin something that the bowls complete.

It begins with the trumpets, escalates into its point of completion with the bowls. Now let me show you these judgments again just in case you forgot because there's so many similarities between the first trumpet and the first bowl. The second trumpet and the second bowl. If you notice here, the first trumpet, you see hail and fire mixed with blood destroy one-third of the earth. That's the important word. It destroys the trees and the green grass. The next doesn't hurt the earth. It hurts the sea. One third of the sea is affected by this blazing mountain.

Will there literally be a blazing mountain? People debate that. It's somewhat irrelevant. The point is the sea will be impacted. And one third of the life within will die. That's followed by not seawater, but spring water, struck by a blazing star that kills the animals who depend on that water for life. That's followed by not the sea or the springs, but the sun. One third of the sun is struck by darkness; it disrupts the circadian rhythm of life. You got to get up earlier, go to bed later, it messes up the cycle of the sun.

That's followed by the fifth trumpet. Notice these four, just like the four horsemen were set apart, these four are set apart in that they strike the earth. But trumpets five and six don't strike the earth, physical creation; they strike the people of the earth with spiritual torment. So this angel unlocks the abyss of hell. It unleashes these demonic locusts that torment the people of the beast. The people of the beast are the people who reject Christ, want nothing to do with God, and who follow this antichrist or this false Christ.

Those people are tormented, it says in the fifth trumpet. And then the sixth trumpet says that another angel unleashes four angels on the Euphrates, and then they unleash a 200 million troop army that kills one-third of the human race. Again, it gets so easy and tempting to get sucked up into the details of what these things are, but I want you to remember they're images, they're symbolic; they're communicating literal truths in an oftentimes non-literal way. But I want you to notice the similarities between these trumpets and the bowls. Just like the first trumpet hit the earth, what does the first bowl hit?

It hits the earth. Just like the second trumpet hit the sea, what does the second bowl hit? It hits the sea. Just like the third trumpet hit the rivers or the spring water. What does the third bowl hit? The rivers and the spring waters. And so you see this intensification, God's judgment beginning with the trumpets and completing with the bowls. Finally, after the seventh trumpet is blown, you see this tension building between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the beast. You see this war begin to be developed right here.

The Euphrates is dried up, prepares the way for the kings of the East. That war is sometimes described as the battle of Armageddon, some think of it as the battle of Gog and Magog. Whatever the case may be, it brings insane destruction on the earth. The earth is destroyed and brings back the return of the king who establishes a new kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. That's the basic sketch outline of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. What you might think of the rest of the book of the Revelation as what Paul Harvey would call the rest of the story.

Or however he said it. The rest of the story— some scholars call them these interludes or these parenthetical discourses. You see one in chapter 7, you see another one in chapter 10, you see another one in chapter 11, there's a big one in 12 to 14, another one in chapters 16 and 17— 17 and 18. If you think of these seven seals, trumpets, and bowls as the pillars, you might think of these other parenthetical chapters as the sheetrock. Okay, you're building a house, you got the main frame: seals, trumpets, bowls.

Then you're filling in the gaps with the sheetrock and the insulation. That's these other chapters. And they all communicate the same basic truth. I put another chart up here— I'm chart-happy this morning— but I want you to notice that when they tell the rest of the story, the rest of the story has the same basic idea. In chapter 6, you got these cosmic signs and wonders. The wrath of the lamb is coming. The question is raised, who can stand? And then chapter 7 opens with 144,000 people sealed by God, marked and protected.

Those are the people who can stand. Tribulation will be great, but God's people will be delivered. Chapter 10 follows the seven trumpets. You see this cataclysmic destruction on the earth, and then chapter 10 opens with a mighty angel. And the mighty angel says, in the days of the seventh trumpet, there will no longer be any delay. But the kingdom of God will come, and it's a reminder that God's purpose will prevail according to his plan. Chapter 11 opens with two witnesses testifying to God's grace in Christ, they are persecuted by the beast.

The antichrist seeks to kill them and stop them, but no matter how hard he tries, the witnesses preach until their time is finished. Then the antichrist kills them, but even then they can't keep them down because they come back to life after three days. What's the point of chapter 11? God's witnesses will testify despite all opposition. Neither persecution nor execution can ultimately keep them down. That's followed by chapters 12, 13, and 14, which

you might think of as a big drama. Chapter 12 opens with Satan, the dragon, seeking to thwart God's plan in Christ.

He seeks to devour the child of the woman, who is Jesus, the Messiah. Satan is ultimately unsuccessful, and so he is cast out of heaven. He's full of rage, and he tries to persecute the early church, driving them into the wilderness just like he persecutes the church today. That's followed by chapter 13, which is a zooming in of how Satan attacks God's people. He uses these beasts, which are symbolic, metaphorical for Satan's tools of the trade, how he uses ruthless, authoritarian, godless governments and false religion and spiritual idolatry to lead the people of God astray.

Chapter 13 shows the people of God being crushed, martyred, persecuted. But even then, ultimately, Satan is unsuccessful because chapter 14 opens with the Lamb[2] standing on Mount Zion with his 144,000 clothed in white robes, victorious over the enemy. And the gospel of God in chapter 14 is proclaimed throughout the entire earth. You see these angels proclaiming these warnings and these messages and the eternal gospel being preached throughout the earth. And then finally the last one is Babylon. Babylon, Mystery Babylon, the seductive prostitute, leading people astray into spiritual idolatry, prosperity, worldly power, kings and nations are seduced by her.

It looks as if they're the biggest dog in the fight. It looks like they're going to overcome the people of God. But even Babylon is destroyed. And not by God's people, but by another godless nation, which is the beast that she rode on for so many years. The very beast that she thought would give her her strength is the source of her destruction. And you see her fall in Revelation chapter 18. Even that great power inevitably falls according to the sovereign plan of God. And so I don't know how you can say it— you could say it so many different ways, but the main message of all of those interludes is the same.

And it is that it doesn't matter how much power and influence Satan or evil amasses in this world, the ultimate outcome is always the same. And that ultimate outcome is that God's people will persevere. God's gospel will be proclaimed. God's purpose will prevail, and God's kingdom will come. You see it in chapter 7, you see it in chapter 10, you see it in chapter 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. The same thing happens. God's people persevere because they're marked and protected. God's plan prevails because he's sovereign over everything. God's gospel will be proclaimed despite the opposition.

In fact, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. The harder they resist, the further the message goes. And then God's kingdom will inevitably come according to his plan. And so the message of Christ to the church is you will overcome. The message of the church to their Christ is you are worthy to be worshipped. The message of God to this world is that in the world you will experience tribulation. This world is broken. It's not the way it's supposed to be. But to God's people, he says, When I come, you'll receive vindication.

So persevere. Don't give up. It doesn't matter. I know it looks bleak. I know it is difficult. But no matter how much power and influence Satan amasses in this world, God's people will overcome, God's plan will prevail, His gospel will be preached, and His kingdom will come. That's the message of the book of the Revelation. Okay? It's not who is the beast and what's the mark of the beast and what nations are going to be involved in the battle of Gog and Magog and when's all that going to happen. Those are secondary— not unimportant, but they're secondary questions to the main message.

And we need to recover the main message. We need to be people who live with the end in mind. I think there's a temptation, and I was just as bad as everybody else. You know, before I preached through the book of the Revelation, I was one of those pastors who like a lot of Christians, just kind of poo-pooed the message. Jesus says we'll never know the day and the hour. We don't need to get wrapped up in it. Let's not talk about it. Let's just focus on the mission. And I shouldn't have done that.

Jesus encourages his disciples to know the signs of the times. And if you read through the New Testament, which I've been doing over and over again, with a different set of lenses, and you begin to ask the question, just how important was the second coming of Jesus to the early church? You begin to realize it was not secondary importance, it was not third- or fourth-tier important; it was primary. It was of utmost importance. The way they thought about the gospel, in other words, was not just about looking back to the cross and what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

What you see in the New Testament epistles in particular, when they motivate obedience, when they motivate faith, almost always they're looking back and forward. They're saying, look back to what Jesus did on the cross and look forward to what he's going to do when his kingdom comes. And so what I want us to think about this morning as we close our time together is to be people who don't just look back to what Christ accomplished on the cross, but to also look forward to what Christ will do through his kingdom that is to come.

How many of you have ever heard about the Protestant Reformation? Martin Luther? Okay, good. We're not totally ignorant of church history. All right, that's good. We're a Protestant church, right? We're not Catholic, we're Protestant. That means we agree that the Protestant Reformation was a good thing by and large. It was a good thing because it recaptured the solas, the five solas: sola scriptura, sola fide, salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone; all of those things absolutely crucial. But by and large, what the Reformation did is it helped the church recapture the importance of what Christ did in the past.

It pointed us back to the cross, the significance of the work of Jesus on the cross, the church probably would not have survived without that recapturing of that message. It's absolutely central. But I think because we're so prone to always look back, and there's so many Christians and certainly this world who kind of poo-poo the idea of looking forward, We've

lost something incredibly important that was central to how the New Testament motivated faith and obedience to the Lord. When I went to preacher school, they talk about how when you're going to preach and motivate people to follow Jesus and obey the Lord, you can't just get up there and preach the imperatives.

The motivation for obedience to the imperatives is found in the indicatives. How many English teachers out there? You're like, What are you talking, Spanish up there? No, no, no. Imperatives are statements of command. Do this, don't do that. That's an imperative, all right? The indicatives are statements of fact. Moses received the Ten Commandments. Jesus died on the cross. That's called an indicative. And what they say in preacher school is you can't just get up there and say be holy and forgive one another and all that stuff. You can preach till you're blue in the face; you'll just be yelling.

Motivation for the commands is found in the statements of fact. Because Jesus died on the cross, be holy. Because we've been forgiven, forgive. Does that make sense? So past imperatives are the motivation for future obedience— past indicatives are the motivation for future imperatives? Absolutely. But it's not just past indicatives that matter. It's not just that Jesus died on the cross. It's at least that. But it's also that he's coming again and bringing a kingdom. When we only focus on the past, I think we have a lopsided obedience. In fact if you listen to a lot of preaching, you find one of two different stripes.

There's a kind of a legal, forensic approach to preaching, which says Jesus died on the cross for our sins. We've been forgiven even though we don't deserve it. We've been justified. It's just as if I'd never sinned. And so in view of God's mercies in the past, become who you already are in Christ. God has already made you holy, so live holy. That's kind of a legal approach to sanctification. The other approach, maybe the more liberal mainline lovey-dovey types, have a more love-based approach to preaching. Look at the cross. See Jesus' love for you.

He loves you this much. Look at his sacrifice, look at his life, look how he laid everything down. Because he loved you that much, you should love him too. In both cases it's kind of playing on guilt. It's looking to the past, saying, look at what's happened in the past, therefore live this way in the future. That preaching's not wrong. I've done a lot of that preaching. I just think it's incomplete. It would be kind of like if your parents were motivating you to do something and they said, Well, you should do this because I wiped your rear end when you were a little baby and you couldn't wipe your own rear end and I paid the bills when you couldn't pay the bills and I fed you when you couldn't cook, and, you know, go through the list, what mom and dad did for you.

And yes, that will motivate obedience to some degree, but it's not nearly as powerful as saying, If you'll do what I'm asking you to do, there's a reward in the future. If you'll persevere, it's going to be worth it in the end. I remember when my mom said if you'll read a

book of the Bible, I'll give you a dollar. No, she said, I'll give you five dollars for every book of the Bible that you read. I read every short New Testament epistle within one day. I made a lot of money.

Then I got to the hard stuff and I quit reading. But there was power. There's power to that future reward. And I want to show you, and I want you to test this on your own. Go read the New Testament. Go find every command. Go find every imperative. And see what the motivation for those things are in the New Testament. Certainly a lot of them say look back in view of God's mercies, but they also point forward. The world's passing. Don't conform to the world. The world's passing away. In view of God's— the time is near; therefore live this way.

Even the very notion of faith, it's based on future hope, future reward. If you're taking notes, the best motivation for obedience in the present is found in God's promise about our future. Let me show you this. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1. He gives a definition of faith. He says faith is the assurance of what is hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. So the very essence of the definition of faith is not just assurance about what has happened in the past, but assurance of what's going to come in the future.

He continues in verse 6, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists"—past—"and that he rewards those who seek him"—future. Let me show you in the New Testament epistles how this works itself out. Titus chapter 2 talks about renouncing ungodliness. Don't live immoral lives. Notice in verse 11, he says, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people." That's talking about the past: the incarnation of Jesus, his death on the cross. It is "instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age."

Why? Look at the next verse: "while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Then he goes back to the past again: "He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works." So you see that it's past, it's future, it's past, it's future, it's both and. The gospel is not just about looking back, it's also about looking forward. Let me show you again. 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 talks about enduring suffering.

The church in Thessalonica was being beaten and battered because of their faith in Jesus Christ. And Paul writes to them and says, "It is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom"—future—"for which you also are suffering"—present suffering tied to future glory—"since it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you." In other words, God's going to judge in the future because of what you're experiencing in the present. "And to give relief to you who are afflicted, along with us." When will this take place?

"This will take place at the revelation"—at the apocalypse—"of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels, when he takes vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength on that day when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at by all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed. In view of this, we always pray for you that our God will make you worthy of his calling, and by his power fulfill your every desire to do good and your work produced by faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified by you, and you by him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Okay, again and again and again. I want God to make you worthy of the calling to which you've been called; so it's in view of the future, that this is going to happen. It's in view of the future that you persevere through suffering. It's in view of the future judgment of God on these people that you deal graciously with them, that you turn the other cheek, that you do these things, that you suffer in a Christ-like way. One more. First Peter chapter 4, verse 7 has a list of different imperatives.

Love one another, be hospitable. Speak with God's words, serve with God's strength, all of these different imperatives. What's the motivation? The end of all things is near. Therefore—what's the therefore there for? It's therefore because the end of all things is near. That's why I'm going to be alert and sober-minded for prayer. That's why I'm going to maintain constant love for other believers. That's why I'm going to be hospitable without complaining. I'm going to serve others. I'm going to speak the words of God with boldness. I'm going to serve people with the strength that God provides.

Every single imperative is grounded in an indicative, but not just indicatives about the past, but indicatives about the future. That's the motivation. That's why we need the book of the Revelation. That's why we need to recover the Maranatha message. And the Maranatha— the word Maranatha just means come, Lord Jesus. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. That's what will motivate us to walk in faith and obedience to the Lord. I think a lot of us in here would say there's incredible power when I look back to the cross. Even with the Lord's Supper, we look back.

We remember how his body was broken for us. We remember how his blood was shed for us. But many people in this room still are struggling to walk in faith and obedience to what the Lord's calling you to do. And maybe you even feel guilty sometimes like maybe I don't love him enough. Maybe I don't see it enough. But the problem may not be because you're not looking back. The problem may be because you stopped looking forward. Maybe for you the return of Jesus is like an afterthought. I don't ever think about that.

I'm busy on the mission. I'm busy on X, Y, and Z. I don't want to become one of those cuckoo-for-Cocoa-Puffs charts guys. And hey, I get it. I'm just like that. But the New Testament is the New Testament. The model is the model. And the New Testament motivation for present obedience is future reward. And so as we take the Lord's Supper, as we respond to the Lord this morning, I want to ask you to ask the Lord to give you the perspective of the first Christians. So whatever it was in them that enabled them to persevere through suffering and to overcome evil and to overcome, like Revelation 2 and 3 talk about, Lord Jesus, give me that.

Because the truth of the matter is these days are difficult and these days are evil and these days are only going to grow worse and worse. The days immediately prior to the second coming of Jesus will not be better than they are today. They'll be worse, which means we need some kind of motivating power. We need something to keep us in the game, to keep us resilient, to keep us bold, unapologetic, standing for righteousness, and we can do that by looking back. We must at least look back. But we also need to look forward, recapturing the Maranatha message.

So as Taylor leads us through a time of response, I want to encourage you to prayerfully consider how the Lord would have you to respond. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, you can come down to the front and say, Hey, I want to give my life to Jesus this morning. I'm tired of trying to save myself. I'm tired of always wondering, have I been good enough? The message of grace is that Jesus has done for you what you can't do for yourself. It's not about what you do, it's about what he's done.

And so you can come and give your life to Christ this morning, and I'll be happy to walk with you through that decision. Others of us are Christian people, and this morning as we take the Lord's Supper, I want you to prepare your heart. Examine yourself, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 11.[3] Judge yourself so that you don't have to be judged by the Lord. Don't take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. We think about the Lord's Supper, we look back at what Jesus was willing to sacrifice, how he was willing to be obedient to the will of the Father because of the joy that was set before him.

And so maybe this morning you would ask the Lord, I want to be full of faith. I want to be obedient to your will. And I want it to be because of the joy that is set before me. And so, Lord Jesus, would you paint a picture of what will be when your kingdom comes again so that I don't shrink back but that I press in to what you're calling me to do. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you for your word. We thank you for the baptism this morning and for the Lord's Supper that we're about to take.

It's an amazing gift that you've given to us to remind us of what's true. The greatest reality in the universe, that God has come in Christ. He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. He has saved us. He has delivered us, and he will come again. And so as difficult

and painful as this world becomes, we do not lose hope. We do not shrink back. But we persevere because we know your purpose will prevail and that we are sealed and protected and that your gospel will go forth and that your kingdom one day will come.

And so until that day we pray, Your kingdom come in our church and in our life on this earth as it is in heaven. And we pray these things in Jesus′ name. Amen.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as ″just like the Egyptians persevered in the wandering of the wilderness″; it was the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness and ate manna. Source: Exodus 16:35 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as ″the lion from the tribe of Judah standing on Mount Zion″; Revelation 14:1 reads ″the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with him were the 144,000.″ Source: Revelation 14:1 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as ″1 Corinthians chapter 10″; Paul′s ″let a person examine himself″ before the Lord′s Supper is 1 Corinthians 11:28 (with ″if we were properly judging ourselves, we would not be judged″ in 11:31). Source: 1 Corinthians 11:28–31 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩