

What have we gotten into?
Small Group Discussion
Revelation 6:9-11, 12:10-12, 13:9-10

Intro questions

- Pastor Josh began Sunday's sermon by talking about a race that he entered that turned out to be much more difficult than expected. Have you ever taken on some endeavor—a competition, or degree, or task, or job—that turned out to be much harder than you expected? If you had known that going in, how would it have changed your approach?
- How do you feel about studying the book of Revelation? (Excited, scared, curious, apathetic, etc.)
- Point out to your group that probably more than any other book of the Bible, this one has been misunderstood, abused, and neglected. It's written in the style called "**apocalyptic**," which means it uses wild, graphic symbols and images to convey ideas. In the time when it was written, people had a great appetite for that style of literature, whereas we have a harder time with it today. It is important to not get lost in the minutia of the detailed images, but instead, to step back and try to see the broader message that they convey.

1. Read Rev. 1:9-11, then discuss the following.
 - a. What can you gather about John's situation here as he writes?
 - b. What/who was the inspiration for the images recorded in Revelation?
 - c. Who was the original, intended recipient of Revelation? Do you know anything about those churches?
 - d. Pastor Josh said that when studying and passage of the Bible, a cardinal rule is, "You have to know what it *meant* before you can know what it *means*." What did he mean with this claim? Why is this principle especially important when studying the book of Revelation?

2. Review this background information that Josh gave for the book of Revelation:

So now you have these new followers of Jesus, feeling like fish out of water, saying, "Jesus hasn't come back yet. We don't know when he's coming back. What are we supposed to do in the mean time?" What they thought would be a short sprint is turning into a marathon, and what they don't realize is that not only is it becoming a marathon, the race course is about to take them through a treacherous mine field. And if they don't have some kind of mental preparation, they're going to be caught off-guard and give up. We get the sense from the way that John addresses some of these specific churches in the early chapters that they are on the brink of spiritual disaster.

It's in this setting that the Spirit of God gives John a series of visions about what's getting ready to happen, so that the people of God will know what to expect. And the symbols are not primarily coded depictions of the end times. There is some stuff in here about the end, but mostly John is pointing to what's about to happen throughout the Roman Empire so that these early Christians won't totally cave in when it happens. And if we understand that context, then we can see how it applies to us.

3. Read Rev. 6:9-11, then discuss the following.
 - a. In this vision of what's presently playing out in heaven, who does John "see?" (Answer: Christian martyrs.)
 - b. According to these verses, why were they killed?
 - c. What is the essence of their question for God? (v. 10). Can you identify with their sense of longing?
 - d. How would you describe God's answer to their question, in your own words?

- e. Pastor Josh said this about the metaphor of the white robes: “The metaphor is most likely an allusion to a **Roman triumphal procession**. When Roman armies would come back from a military campaign victorious, the citizens would line the streets to welcome them back and they would all put on white robes. The white robes were a way of saying, ‘We’re all victors in this war because of what these soldiers have accomplished.’ It was the sign of a vicarious victor.” What would this image symbolize, then, with regard to Christian martyrs?
4. Read Rev. 12:10-12, then discuss the following.
- What is Satan’s role in the hardships that Christians are now facing, according to these verses?
 - According to v. 11a, how did the martyrs “triumph” over Satan? Flesh out these two components of their triumph.
 - “They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (v. 11b). Most likely, none of us really knows how we would respond when faced with the prospect of death for our faith. But based on where your heart is today, do you think that this same description would be true of you? Or is there something that would cause you to “shrink from death?” *Be as honest as possible, for it is in truly disclosing where we are that we are able to begin experiencing growth.*
5. Read Rev. 13:9-10, then discuss the following.
- Pastor Josh summarized one of the major messages of Revelation as follows: “**Expect things to get worse before they get better**. We live in a season between the first and second coming of Jesus when suffering and testing are the norm for Christians.”
 - Based on what you’ve read in Revelation today, what are the specific ways that Christians can expect things to get worse before they get better?
 - What are some specific ways that you have experienced this reality—or if you haven’t experienced it directly, what have you heard about others experiencing this reality?
 - In addition to outright persecution, Pastor Josh said that John warns us about the **temptation to assimilate**—to adopt the customs of the prevailing culture in order to maintain the comfortable status quo. What does this look like in our current setting? Have you experienced this tendency?
 - According to v. 10, what response is called for by this reality?
 - Next week we will see more about how Revelation enables us to endure patiently—but for now, what have you already seen here that enables us to faithfully and patiently endure?
6. If you have time, read some of the stories of Christian martyrs at the websites below, and see what inspiration you can draw from their lives and deaths.
- <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/martyrs/>
 - <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/>

Prayer

- Pray about whatever may have surfaced in your preceding discussion: fears, outright persecution, etc.
- Pray for persecuted Christians (including those you may have read about), as the Spirit leads you
- Share and pray about whatever other needs and concerns are weighing on your minds.