NUMBER 3 – Safety In times of trouble

So far, we have seen a vision of the glorious risen Lord Jesus Christ. He was seen by John walking among the lampstands (his church) – but the church was not without its problems as we saw in chapters 2 and 3. But John’s eyes are then directed to the very throne room of heaven where he sees the vision of the lamb holding a scroll which only he can open. This is God’s plan to save us from sin and give us an eternal hope for the future.

1. The lesson here appears to be that when things are tough, we don’t just stay with the problem. Rather we look to God for his answers.

Do we sometimes spend too long thinking about our problems without turning to God for his wisdom?

Chapter 6 starts the process of opening the seals. As they are opened, they reveal the heavenly evil forces that are released upon the earth. This helps explain the experiences of the seven churches as they suffer and are persecuted and even die for their faith. The works of those evil forces brings punishment to some but also works to refine the faith of others.

1. Do we take the idea of ‘heavenly evil forces’ seriously enough?

Where do we see Satan at work in our world today?

What is he doing to the church?

How do we oppose him?

To assume that the world is really quite OK is naïve. First century believers would have been offended if what they were going through could be explained by good men occasionally getting things wrong. God’s people need to know that he is both sovereign and active in the protection of his people even though wickedness appears to have the upper hand at times.

The first four seals have revealed the judgement of God on various areas of wickedness in a world ravaged with sin. In God’s economy sin cannot be ignored. If we are to understand the nature of God’s salvation, then we must understand the state we were in before God started on his plan of salvation. Revelation honestly confronts the reality of sin and its consequences. It must have been a great comfort to 1st century believers that the wickedness which so affected their lives came from satanic powers opposed to God’s rule.

1. God’s word to John doesn’t try to hide the existence of wickedness in the world.

Is it better to face the reality of evil rather than trying to say that everything will be alright in the end?

The ‘pregnant woman’ of verse 2 is unlikely to be Mary or even Eve as some have suggested. The moon is under her feet – she is a person of authority. (’12 stars’ mean she is someone of royal status) The ‘moon and twelve stars’ is very similar to Joseph’s dream where they represent the whole company of God’s people. The woman is ***God’s church***. The dragon picture is menacingly awesome – his great tail drags a third of the stars down to earth but not all of them. 10 horns signify great power. But the message is that God is on the throne. God has sent a real baby who Satan would love to kill. But the woman ends up in a place of safety - and the child will rule the nations

1. John’s message is that the church will suffer (the stars the dragon grabs) but the woman is safe because of the work of the son who died and rose again.

Should we, therefore, be optimistic about the church with all its wrinkles?

Should we be more positive than we sometimes are?

Should we accept that hard times purify the church to prepare her for glory?

12:8 tells us that Satan is kicked out of heaven – he’s a loser so we should back the winner !!!!!!! Our eternal future and our present lives are secure if we trust in our Saviour. But this passage shows us that God has complete empathy with our earthly struggles.

Chapter 13 reveals another beast that comes out of the sea (13:1) – the imagery comes from Daniel 7:3 to 8. A quick read of chapter 13 will tell you that this beast persecutes the church and seduces unbelievers who might consider following Christ. Some have tried to pin the ‘beast’ name on Nero but John’s point is broader than that. This beast represents anyone who ‘makes war against the saints .. to conquer them’ (13:7)’

1. At John’s time, the persecutors were the Roman authorities. But think about situations in our 20th or 21st centuries where individuals or groups tried or are trying to obliterate Christianity.

Perhaps you have time to pray for some of the people in those situations.

But be encouraged by the fact that the beast is only given a month (13:5) – God is in control.

In chapter 14, John’s vision returns to the redeemed people of God. The figure of 144,000 has been much abused but it must never be taken as a literal count of God’s people. Numbers in Revelation are rarely used in that way. ‘12’ is always the number God’s complete people dating from the 12 tribes of Israel (Jesus also chose 12 apostles). This number is 12 x 12 x 1000 – so you could say it is an over statement of completeness to be sure we get it. It is ‘complete x complete x many’. These people follow ‘the Lamb’ and he is on Mount Zion (the place where Messiah reigns) (14:1). And they sing a song of worship and only those numbered by God could sing the song. (14:3)

1. We are chosen by God and he is aware of every single one of us – we are NUMBERED.

Does your everyday experience of God suggest to you that you are that precious to God?

Do we sometimes dwell too much with present troubles to lose the vision of our eternal future?

What does it mean for us today to be secure in our relationship with God?

A POSSIBLE EXERCISE

During the coming week read these chapters in Revelation (chapters 12 to 14)

There is a lot of imagery which we hope is now a little clearer.

Think about the fact that the world suffers from the deeds of wicked people – it always has. The fact that God told 1st century people that he understood their trials and tribulations must have been a real comfort to them. We must never live hoping that, one day soon, wickedness will go away. It won’t until the Lord Jesus returns.

Spend time reflecting that you are one of God’s precious children safe and secure in the arms of a sovereign God who understands all about your present trials whatever they are.

DON’T GIVE UP – once you get into it you will find Revelation such a blessing and, in the end, you’ll get to the wonderful place where you’ll rest in Christ forever and all that is evil will be banished.