



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

02 – Eschatology

Announcements:

12/5 @6:30 -

Men's Discipleship
- Question 4

12/7 @7:00 -

Prayer

12/8 @6:30 -

Grace Group

12/11 @8:30 -

Sunday School

ICE BREAKER: What is your most cherished book of the Bible?

READ: Revelation 5:1-10

Last week we tried to cover a huge theological topic in imputation. Today we are trying our hand at something that is probably more difficult, eschatology. Eschatology is the fancy term for all things having to do with the end times or “last days”. I had originally planned on taking a bit of a longer look at the text that we closed service with on Sunday, Revelation chapter 5. However, since the book of Revelation is about the most technical and most disagreed on book of the Bible, instead of looking for dogmatic answers to many questions, or diving deep into this one text, instead we are going to use “David’s system for getting the most out of apocryphal literature while acknowledging that it is intentionally opaque” (patent pending!) to help give a starting place to read this book for yourself.

The first step is humility. If you were to get 100 pastors locked in a room and ask them all what each and every verse in the book of Revelation means, I would bet you would not find 2 that agree 100% of the time. So we must be humble enough to say, I may be wrong about this, but I *think* this is what this passage means. It takes humility to read a commentary or hear a sermon and someone says something that you disagree with (within reason) and still be willing to hear them out and not get defensive. One day I had an epiphany that really made this stick for me. In the time of Jesus, the ones who were the most well read on Prophecy. The one who knew it better than anyone else, and whose opinions and thoughts were considered most authoritative on the Prophecies could not see the fulfillment of all that prophecy as Jesus walked around right in front of them (namely the Pharisees and Sadducees)! So I should be very careful in assuming that my answer is always the right one.

DISCUSS: What are some other reasons that humility would be important in understanding difficult portions of Scripture?

The next step is identifying where the difficulties lie in gaining understanding. Part of it is our lack of familiarity with this type of writing; part of it is our temporal and geographical separation from the original audiences (namely the seven churches in Asia); but ultimately I would say that the biggest difficulty is that Revelation is *filled* with symbols and pictures. Just to highlight this we can look to Revelation 5. We have a Scroll (written on both sides), a Lion who is a Lamb... and a root, “four living creatures”, a throne, the lamb again, but this time with has “seven horns with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God” (good luck with that one!), a harp, golden bowls of incense ... and there is more. Anyone seeking to understand this book needs to make decisions on these. Are all of them important? Are any of them “just” pictures? What would it even mean to say one is just a picture? If they are all important, what do they all mean? What does your understanding of one say about any (or all!) of the others? Symbolic language is truly the crux of understanding this book?

DISCUSS: What, if any, baseline “rules” can you think of for understanding symbolic pictures? What can or should be your guiding principle?

The third step to finding understanding is for me the most pragmatic one. I ask: what joy/hope/truth would a first century believer find in this passage. Ultimately this was written to a group of struggling, largely persecuted, young churches as a way to strengthen their faith. So whatever I learn or take from this passage needs to have had value to them too. In doing this I believe the true beauty of Revelation comes to the fore. Instead of being a “crazy, scary” book it is one of immense and tangible hope and joy. God has a plan, he will rule and reign. In the midst of trials he is God, in the midst of tribulation his plan is still sovereign. These are to me the most important messages to gain from this book!

DISCUSS: What do you think is the most important or foundational message of the text we read on the Scroll and lamb? How does this undertaking help know the rest of the book of Revelation?