

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

“Salvation, Evangelization, and Consummation (New Creation)”

Hebrews 11:1-4, John 1:1-4, Genesis 1, John 14:8-11, John 3:14-17, Numbers 21:4-9,
Acts 8:26-39, Acts 10, Acts 15:1-21, Revelation 21:1-7, Revelation 22:1-5

Notes from Pastor Bill:

Salvation

The Biblical story of salvation through Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God is told in four Gospel accounts: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. You will remember that in the opening chapters of Genesis we found two different stories of creation. Each one was important for conveying a message about God’s love and intention for God’s creation. In much the same way, the four Gospels of the New Testament provide for us a quartet rather than a solo for hearing the melody of grace and eternal life.

Aside from the birth narratives found only in Matthew and Luke, all of the Gospel writers tell basically the same story. Jesus began his ministry as an itinerant teacher and healer in a relatively small area along the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. A three-year ministry ended in Jerusalem, where he publicly confronted the Jewish religious leaders who had been challenging his teachings from the beginning.

Each of the Gospel writers was announcing the “good news” of the redemptive grace of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And each one was writing for a specific audience with specific needs. Mark was writing to encourage believers in Rome who may have been facing imminent persecution. Luke’s audience was Gentile believers. Matthew seems to have been writing for those who came to Christ from the Jewish faith. John goes deeply into theological teaching and meaning.

Evangelization

The Greek word for “good news,” or “gospel,” is euaggelos. The word evangelism is almost a transliteration of that word. The proclamation of the good news about God’s grace and love in Jesus Christ, as well as the promise of eternal life, is called evangelization. More simply put, it is simply telling others about Jesus and inviting them to make him the Lord of their lives.

Evangelization began fifty days after Easter on a Jewish holy day called Pentecost. 120 believers were gathered in a large second floor room in Jerusalem when they experienced something that they described as wind and fire among them. Immediately they were compelled to leave the room and go into the streets around them speaking about Jesus in languages that they had never studied. Some people thought they had been into the wine before happy hour, but Peter declared this activity to be evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke, tells the story of the work of Peter and the believers in Jerusalem, as well as the work of the apostle Paul. Paul was initially one who persecuted those who strayed away from traditional Judaism to follow Jesus, but he was converted on the road to Damascus and ended up being the most important missionary of the Christian faith.

Luke describes three missionary journeys of Paul, as well as the events that led to his arrest and subsequent detention in Rome, where tradition says, like Peter, he was a martyr for his faith. The word martyr comes from the Greek hamartia, which means, "witness." A Christian martyr is a witness to faith in Jesus Christ, and in the early centuries of the Christian movement that witness often meant a death sentence. That is still the case in many places in the world today.

The Acts of the Apostles is followed in the New Testament by twenty-one letters. Many of them were written by Paul to churches that he had started. Others were meant to be read and circulated among believers in an area. Following the letters of Paul, we find other letters written by various leaders in the early church. Paul's letters are both inspirational and practical. Some of them cover great theological themes, and others deal with real down to earth conflicts and issues with which churches today still struggle.

Consummation (New Creation)

The final words are consummation and new creation because in the Book of the Revelation God brings to a final victorious end all of history and makes "all things new." The Bible then ends where it began, with creation. *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away..."* (Revelation 21:1) What God intended from the beginning God makes certain will endure even beyond the end.

The book of Revelation is an apocalypse, a genre of literature with which most of us are unfamiliar. Filled with strange and frightening images, as puzzling as it may be to us today, in the first century people would have more readily understood its significance. (The book of Daniel in the Old Testament contains similar apocalyptic themes.) It seems that apocalyptic writing occurred in times when people of faith were experiencing persecution at the hands of evil enemies. Daniel's apocalypse, set in the time of the Babylonian exile, may actually have been written during the period of the Greek Seleucid kings who outlawed the practice of Judaism in Israel and desecrated the Temple with idols and swine. The New Testament Revelation to John was written during the time of the violent Roman persecution of Christians.

Even though the popular tendency today is to use the Book of Revelation as a map or spiritual time clock predicting the end of the world, that interpretation has been used only for the last two hundred years or so.

Regardless of how you view revelation, the basic message is that in the end, God's love for his faithful people wins out over evil. The message of salvation, the unwavering intention of

God to heal and make all things whole again, comes clearly at the opening verses of the last chapter of the Bible.

The Bible returns to the place where it began: a new earth created by a loving God. The tree of life, which was last seen in the Garden of Eden guarded by an angel lest anyone seek to eat of it and live forever, is now available to all with its healing leaves. It stands on either side of the “river of life” that flows directly from the throne of God. God’s initial creation, light, is no longer dependent on the sun or human lamps, for God alone is the source of it.

Human beings whose basic temptation was the desire to “be like God” are now inheritors of the riches of heaven not because they chose to take it, but because God in Jesus chose to give it to them.

Human history comes to consummation in a new creation.

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.”

And let everyone who hears say, “Come.”

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

Questions for Discussion & Reflection:

- If you are studying in a group, share one of your favorite stories from the gospels and explain why that is. If you are studying alone, think about what passages from the gospels have shaped your understanding of Jesus.
- Talk with your group about what ways you can “evangelize” without words.
- If we were to make a new canon (or add to the existing one), share with the group what writings and authors would you want to include and why.