



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*A Good Ending*  
Revelation 11:15–19  
Mark Mitchell  
January 17, 2010

series: Bookends: The Story of Creation & Consummation from Genesis & Revelation

Last January Barack Obama was inaugurated as the President of the United States. It was one of the most anticipated and celebrated events of our lifetime. Many people commented on the almost Messianic-like hopes that people had for his presidency. For many, it was high time for change and all their hopes and aspirations were bound up in this one event and what it meant. And it went incredibly well, with one exception. The swearing-in ceremony was a bit disappointing. Chief Justice Roberts stood wearing his black robe on the podium before over a million people in the Washington Mall and millions more on TV. Obama placed his left hand on the same Bible Abraham Lincoln used and raised his right hand.

Roberts asked, "Are you prepared to take the oath, Senator?"

Obama replied, "I am."

Roberts began, "I Barack Hussein Obama do solemnly swear." But halfway through the line Obama interrupted him and began repeating the line. Roberts paused and Obama then repeated the entire first line. Then Roberts quoted the next line of the oath—but incorrectly. He was supposed to say, "That I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States." Instead Roberts said, "That I will execute the office of president to the United States faithfully." He moved the word faithfully to the end of the sentence. Obama paused to allow Roberts to correct himself, and then repeated the oath as Roberts had incorrectly stated it. From then on, the oath was done correctly.

Although the inauguration ceremonies and events continued on, the misquoted oath left some lawyers uncomfortable. Just to cover all their bases, the next day they had Justice Roberts swear him in again the right way!

But it's not just the swearing-in that was a disappointment. This past week I was watching the news and learned that many of the hopes and dreams associated with Obama's Presidency have thus far produced even more disappointment. His approval ratings are now below 50%.

None of this is meant to be a political statement. It just strikes me how so often we place our hopes and dreams on an event or someone who can bring about real change and they end up disappointing us. That's why so many people are jaded and cynical today. They've been burned far too many times, so they don't trust anyone or anything.

In Revelation 11 we're allowed to get a peek at the one events in human history that won't disappoint. It's the event that all history has been aiming for since the beginning of time. In a way, it will be an inauguration.

Let me set the context. We've seen the sounding of the first six of seven trumpets. These trumpet blasts brought unparalleled devastations to the earth. But before the sounding of the seventh trumpet there was a long interlude, starting in chapter 10 where John was told to eat the bittersweet scroll. It was sweet because it told of the victory of God but bitter because it spoke of the suffering and martyrdom of his people in the process. But as the interlude extended into chapter 11, through the measuring of the temple, John was given assurance that God's people would be ultimately preserved during these terrible judgments. John told of two witnesses who together represent the church in the end times. He told of their faithful witness, and then their death at the hands of the beast, and finally how God raised them up and took them to heaven. Then there was a great earthquake and one tenth of the people were killed but the rest gave glory to the God of heaven.

And with that we're ready. We're ready for the sounding of the seventh trumpet. But we're not so sure what to expect. In v.14 the angel calls this "*the third woe*" so we may expect another terrible judgment. But the angel told John back in chapter 10 when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet "*then the mystery of God is finished...*" That's the consummation of history. That's something to look forward to. But what will happen? What will it look like? Why can we look forward to this and **not** be disappointed? Listen as I read 11:15-19.

**"Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.' And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and**

**the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm."**

There are three things God will do that will allow this event to fulfill all of our expectations. God will reign. God will judge. And God will open. Let's look at each of these.

### **God will reign**

First of all, God will reign. The first thing the loud voices of heaven say is, "*the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.*" Notice the past tense is used here as it is throughout this passage as a way of stressing the certainty of these things by looking at future events as completed action. "*The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord...*" That hasn't happened yet, but it will happen.

Right now there are two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of this world and there is the kingdom of God. This isn't talking about geography or what we think of as nations, but rather spiritual kingdoms. There are really just two. Jesus said, "*My kingdom is not of this world*" (Jn 18:36). The kingdom of this world is in rebellion against God. Three times in John's gospel Jesus called Satan "*the ruler of this world*" (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). So those who follow Jesus are part of his kingdom and everyone else is part of Satan's kingdom. That's a very black and white view of things. There is no in-between, but that's what Jesus taught.

But here we're told the day will come when the two will become one. God the Father, who is here called our "Lord" and Jesus who is here called "His Christ" will retake what is rightfully theirs and reign over all. In v.17 the elders thank God, saying, "*you have taken your great power and begun to reign.*" It's like up until this time God was holding back, but now he unleashes his power and wrests authority from all hostile powers. We sing the song, *God You Reign* and it's true; he does reign. But let's not forget that there is a sense in which right now he doesn't reign. There is a rival kingdom out there who doesn't acknowledge his authority and who wants nothing to do with him. That's why he taught us to pray, "*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" That's not a reality right now. For now God is holding back because he wants people to turn to him before it's too late.

When God begins to reign it won't be temporary. He says in v.15 "*he will reign forever and ever.*" A president campaigns for office, is elected by the will of the people, but only serves a fixed term. A lot of times it's four years and you're out. That's the difference between a president and a king. A king doesn't campaign for office, but accedes to the throne by right and serves without term. Thailand has a king who has ruled since 1946. That's like Harry Truman still being president! But that's nothing because God will reign forever and ever!

Let me ask you right now—which kingdom are you in? Who is your king? Who runs your life? Who is your authority? In Col 1:13 Paul speaks of a God who "*rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.*" Is that true of you? That happens by a simple act of faith. You confess that you've been living in darkness. You place your trust in Jesus Christ as the One who died for your sins. You surrender your life to him as your Lord and King. Have you done that? Don't wait until your hand is forced. Do it today!

### **God will judge**

The second thing God will do to allow this event to fulfill all our expectations is he will judge. Now you might say, "Wait a minute. God's judgment is nothing to look forward to. Why would we celebrate something like that?" But listen to this quote from N.T. Wright, "The word judgment carries negative overtones for a good many people in our liberal and post-liberal world. We need to remind ourselves that throughout the Bible God's coming judgment is a good thing, something to be celebrated, longed for, yearned over. It causes people to shout for joy and the trees of the field to clap their hands. In a world of systematic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance, and oppression, the thought that there might come a day when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and weak are given their due is the best news there can be. Faced with a world in rebellion, a world full of exploitation and wickedness, a good God must be a God of judgment."

Notice in these verses there are three aspects to God's judgment. The first has to do with his wrath, his anger. The elders cry out, "*Your wrath came and the time came for the dead to be judged.*" Why? Because it says "*the nations were enraged.*" God's wrath isn't irrational, but a fitting response to a world shaking their fist at him. The word translated "enraged" communicates a deep seated and ongoing hostility towards God. This isn't just a little act of rebellion; this is a settled, burning resentment towards God. How will God respond to that? He'll judge it as an expression of his own holy wrath.

The second aspect of God's judgment is he'll "*reward his bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear your name, the small and the great.*" Later in Revelation Jesus says, "*Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done*" (Rev 22:12). It's really strange because we know the power to serve God comes from God as a gift of his grace. Why should we be rewarded when we didn't do it in the first place? But what would life be like without rewards? Rewards motivate us. We all seek reward; the question is, from whom?

In September of 2004, on the 25th anniversary of their first record release, the rock group U2 became eligible for induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. They were very aware of

the significance of what an honor that is, but the band members decided not to become caught up in the accolades and accomplishments of the past. Bassist Adam Clayton said, "I suppose if people want to shower you with honors, the only reasonable thing to do is accept them." But then Drummer Larry Mullen Jr. added: "But it does feel premature. We're trying to stay focused on the big prize."

That's what we need to do—stay focused on the big prize, not the one the world gives but the one God gives his servants. I love how it says this "big prize" is for his *"bondservants the prophets and the saints and those who fear his name, the small and the great."* We tend to think that God will only reward those who are great in our minds like the missionaries and the pastors of large churches. But God is no respecter of persons. Those who come in last on earth will be first in God's kingdom.

The third aspect of God's judgment is that he'll *"destroy those who destroy the earth."* When he talks about those who destroy the earth he's talking about corrupting it. In Rev. 19 John writes, *"He has judged the great harlot (Babylon) who was corrupting the earth with her immorality."* The great harlot is Babylon the Great which is made up of all those who follow the Beast. They're the ones who will be destroyed.

We don't like to think of God in this way. We wonder how a loving God can destroy anyone. The fact is God hates anything that spoils, defaces, distorts, or damages his beautiful creation, most of all his image-bearing people. If God doesn't hate racial prejudice, he's neither good nor loving. If God isn't wrathful at child abuse, he's neither good nor loving. If God isn't utterly determined to root out from his creation the arrogance that allows people to exploit, bomb, bully and enslave one another, he's neither loving, nor good, nor wise.

Are you prepared for this final act of judgment? Are you looking forward to it? Are you focused on the big prize or are you getting your reward now? If you're a follower of Jesus, not in word alone but also in deed, you have nothing to fear. As a matter of fact this is something to look forward to. Frederick Buechner wrote, "The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will ring down the final curtain on history, and there will come a Day on which all our days and all the judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully."

## **God will open**

The final thing God will do doesn't just fulfill our expectations but it surpasses them. God will open. In v.19 John sees the heavenly temple of God opened and the ark of the covenant inside with lightning, thunder, earthquakes and hail.

What's opened here is the Holy of Holies, that most sacred place in the temple where God truly dwelt. Remember no one was allowed in there except the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement. And when he did go in there they would tie a rope around his leg so that if he died from being exposed to the presence of God they could pull him out without having to go in there themselves and risk their own lives! This was a scary place. That's why there is lightning and hail and thunder.

Inside the Holy of Holies was the ark of the covenant. (So **this** is where the lost ark is. I thought it was in a warehouse in Milpitas! But it's been right here the whole time!) This isn't the physical ark, but a spiritual representation of it. What does the ark symbolize? The ark was the central symbol for the presence of God with Israel. It symbolized God's covenant of mercy. It was so sacred that it was closed off from all human contact by a veil.

Today I will board an airplane for Nashville. I will longingly gaze at the curtain that separates me and my lowly friends from the first class passengers. The first-class passengers will be served gourmet food on china and crystal by their own flight attendants; those of us in coach will be lucky to get a snack served in a plastic wrapper. The first-class passengers will have room to stretch and sleep; those of us in coach will be squeezed together like a teenage couple in the back row of a movie. The first-class passengers will have flight attendants bring them moist towels for comfort and personal hygiene while those of us in coach sweat it out. At some point early in the flight a curtain will be drawn to separate the two compartments. It isn't to be violated, just like the veil that kept ordinary people out of the Holy of Holies in the temple. The curtain reminds us that we aren't good enough to go in there.

But remember what happened to that veil when Jesus died? It was torn in two! Why? Because through the death of Jesus he makes us good enough to have free access to God. He pays for our ticket into first class. That's mercy! That's something we enjoy now. We can enter into the Holy of Holies any time we want through the blood of Jesus. But the time is coming when heaven is opened to us and we'll have free access to God. That temple we call heaven will always be open to us. It will be like Denny's—always open!

This is what human beings have longed for since the beginning of time. The belief in some kind of heaven has shaped every civilization in human history. Australian aborigines pictured Heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Finns thought it was a distant island in the far away east. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed that they went to the sun or the moon after death. Native Americans believed that, in the afterlife, their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo. In the pyramids of Egypt, the embalmed bodies had maps placed

beside them as guides to the future world. The Romans believed that the righteous would picnic in the Elysian Fields, while their horses grazed nearby. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, said, "The day thou fearest as the last is the birthday of eternity."

Although these depictions of the afterlife differ, the unifying testimony of the human heart throughout history is belief in heaven. Every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal—that this world is not all there is. And here we see in Revelation the first of many pictures of what heaven will really be like—an open temple inviting us to live in the presence of One so beautiful and Holy that no earthly, human eye can look at him and live.

## **Conclusion**

This vision is one that will not disappoint. But each of us must be ready. God will reign. Are you prepared for that by placing yourself under his authority now? God will judge. Are you prepared for that so that the One you face at judgment is also the One who loves you most fully? God will open. Are you prepared for that by longing to enter his presence now and doing that through the blood of Christ?

C.S. Lewis wrote, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened."