

"Hope & Salvation"

Scripture Passages: 1) **Luke 1:67-80**
2) **Hebrews 2**
3) **Revelation 19-20**

Read Revelation 19:5-20:3

Don't Like Revelation: Can you imagine if you lived within a short distance of the nuclear reactors in Japan? Can you imagine living in a Taliban ruled area of Afghanistan? Can you imagine what it would be like to be living in Tripoli right now? Can you imagine living in a tent city outside of Port-a-Prince Haiti? Can you imagine living in the midst of these kinds of catastrophes, nightmares? Can you imagine living in a meth house right here in Paw Paw?

Those of you who we honor today as Super Seniors have seen a lot in your life time. Some of you have fought in wars. Some of you have known great loss and tragedy. Some of you have lived through great catastrophes and nightmares.

As we have worked our way through Revelation I have tried to provide a context from which to understand John's vision, but even with a good theological context we don't really like the vision. There is so much death, war, destruction. The vision is one huge catastrophe, it is one huge nightmare. We don't like Revelation.

Catastrophe and Salvation: The truth is, however, until we are willing to enter the reality of the catastrophe we have a really hard time embracing the gift of God's salvation. When we spend our lives sugar coating the catastrophe, or shutting our eyes to the catastrophe, or ignoring the catastrophe, or denying the catastrophe then we have little need for God's amazing gift of salvation.

John's Revelation seeks to help us embrace both the catastrophe and the astounding gift of salvation. The fact is all the horrors described in Revelation, all the horrors we experience during this human life, pale in comparison to the catastrophe of being separated from God, whether that it is right now, the next moment, or for eternity. Separation from God is the ultimate catastrophe. (Pause) Separation from God is the ultimate catastrophe. Is that truth a part of your theological bedrock? Does that truth ever enter your mind? Does that truth come into play as you live your daily life? Separation from God is the ultimate catastrophe. How does that truth shape your belief system and the living of your life? Until we embrace catastrophe we have a hard time knowing the astounding gift of salvation.

The Great Blizzard: In one of my sermons I shared some of my near death experiences. When I think about it for a minute, it is quite amazing that I am standing here today, which is probably the case for most of us.

A few days after graduating from high school, I headed out on a week-long backpacking trip in the southwest mountains of Colorado. The trip was my senior class trip from my church. I think there were about 15 graduates, 2 leaders and 2 guides. The trip was through one of Young Life's adventure camps, this one is called Wilderness.

It was the first week in June, which meant it was going to be a true adventure. That early in the season the snow would still be deep and storms could be deadly. The first day was "easy". The 2nd day was brutal. Not long after starting out we hit the snow-line. We post-holed all day. Whoever was leading, each step meant you were up to your waist in snow while carrying a 40

pound pack. We changed the lead person every 15 minutes or so. It was one of the most difficult days of my life. I doubt I could do it now.

Finally as the day was coming to an end we climbed above tree-line which meant we were either free of snow or the snow was so hard-packed it was like walking across concrete. We were an exhausted bunch. We set up our tents, made, ate, cleaned-up dinner and crashed. Sometime in the night the guide in our tent woke me up. Our tent had collapsed. I could tell the wind outside was raging. She and I put on our warm clothes and headed outside. It was blizzard. The snow was heavy and with the wind it had collapsed the tent. Finally we got the tent set back up.

When morning came, the blizzard was still raging. It never let up all day. It was a challenge getting food prepared and getting it into people's bodies. By evening some of our group was starting to get hypothermic. I was only 17, but I had quite a bit of emergency wilderness and medical training under my belt. I knew we were in trouble. I particularly knew we were in trouble because our guides were starting to panic.

That night we had several people sleep in sleeping bags with other people to keep their body temperatures up. Twice through that second night the guide and I set the tent back up after it collapsed. Morning came, the blizzard still raged. We were definitely in trouble. Even those who had never carried a backpack before, who didn't understand the power of nature and the danger of being where we were, experiencing what we were experiencing, knew we were in trouble.

After fixing breakfast we got in our four tents. We matched up the hypothermic people with folks whose core temperatures were still strong, and we began praying. As we prayed, those tents were filled with fearful people. You could feel it. You could smell it. We each knew fear like we had never known it before. We were in a catastrophe like none of us had ever experienced. No one could get to us. No one could help us.

We hadn't been praying very long when we noticed it was quiet. The wind had stopped. We poked our heads out of the tent. The sky was completely clear. There was not a cloud anywhere in sight. We were above tree-line, above 12,000 feet of elevation. We could see a long way. There was not a cloud anywhere. A few minutes earlier it had been a raging blizzard. Then it was simply gone. We had just experienced salvation. We had just experienced God wiping out a catastrophe. Salvation had come. Until we understand the nature of catastrophe we cannot appreciate the astounding gift of salvation.

Christ's Salvific Work: John's vision gives us two powerful images for Christ's Salvific Work, the image of the wedding feast and the image of a great war. These two images seem contradictory; they seem at odds with each other. How can Jesus be both the bridegroom and the great warrior? How can Jesus be the one who both invites us to a great banquet and the one who goes off to war? How can John place these two images side by side?

The two images powerfully grasp the reality of salvation. Salvation includes God's beautiful invitation to the feast, the very feast we celebrate every time we gather here at the table. Communion recognizes the realities of the catastrophe. In communion we recognize that Christ experienced the most brutal death so that salvation could overcome death and evil. But this overcoming happens in the intimacy of a meal. Salvation comes in a personal, intimate, beautiful way, like a marriage, like an intimate dinner with our closest friends. At the same time salvation comes as the all-out war against evil and injustice. "It is these two energies, the embrace of love and the assault on evil, in polar tension, each defined by the other, each feeding into the other through which salvation overcomes catastrophe."

Conclusion: Our greatest hope lies in God's gift of salvation. Salvation is a gift like no other gift. Salvation is a gift of love like that experienced in the intimacy of marriage, and the intimacy of a special meal. At the same time salvation is also the war against evil, the war against catastrophe. As we all know, especially those of you have lived a long life, evil does not just lie down without a fight. To enter such a fight, however, there must be overwhelming love. Salvation is God overcoming catastrophe as an act of great love often having to engage in war.

Today as we gather together around our Lord's Table will we be able to embrace more fully this astounding gift of salvation? As we gather here will we be able to recognize the reality of catastrophe and our need for salvation? John's Revelation has shown us the catastrophe. John's Revelation has shown us God's salvation. The question raised: "Have we embraced our need?"

Hope comes as we recognize our reality and accept God's invitation to the banquet of Salvation. Amen.