

Sermon 5-26-19
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Based on the Second Lesson for the Fifth & Sixth Sundays of Easter, Revelation 21.

Something Is Coming

In 1969 famous pop-singer, Peggy Lee, recorded a haunting hit song called, "Is That All There Is?" The lyrics alternate between spoken words and a sung chorus. It's about a woman sunk in a perennial despair concerning life. As a little child, she watches her house burn down and asks a very sophisticated question. "Is that all there is to a fire?" As a child she goes to the circus and after it's all over asks the same question, "Is that all there is to a circus?" Then as a teen, she falls in love, and after a breakup she wonders, "Is that all there is to love?" The chorus goes like this: "Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball. If that's all there is."

The final verse says, "I know what you must be saying to yourselves, 'If that's the way she feels about it Why doesn't she just end it all' Oh no, not me. I'm in no hurry for that final disappointment. Cause I know just as well as I'm standing here talking to you that when that final moment comes and I'm breathing my last breath I'll be saying to myself. . . . And the chorus begins again, 'Is that all there is'."

According to the website, songfacts.com this is President Donald Trump's favorite song of all time. In an interview he said, "It's a great song. Because I've had these tremendous successes and then I'm off to the next one, because, it's like, 'Oh is that all there is?' That's a great song actually."

And the president's words point to a potentially debilitating problem in life. Once you've won the super bowl, then what? How do you not descend into the debauchery of despair and cynicism?

But most people don't win a super bowl. For most of us, the opposite is true. Given the evil, hardships, failures and sufferings of this life, how do you not descend into the debauchery of despair and cynicism? Indeed, that's the root of our present opioid crisis.

From ancient times all peoples have complained about the despair of this life. Solomon, the wisest man of antiquity wrote in Ecclesiastes 1:12-14, "12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind." Indeed he complained about wisdom itself saying in Ecclesiastes 1:18, "For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief."

This happens because the more you understand, the more hopeless you see it all is. Ultimately, everything in life is building a sand castle against the incoming tide. It's why a house is a hole in the ground in which you throw money. Everything can only end in death, decay and ruin. This is the heavy burden Yahweh has laid on us.

Nevertheless, the one and only real alternative to the despair of this life is Yahweh Himself, the Creator God of heaven and earth for He is the source of life. And He is life in the face of death. Indeed, that's what we're celebrating in this Easter season – life in the face of death.

Of course, the difficult thing here is that if Yahweh is life in the face of death, why doesn't He just come forth and end the meaninglessness, end the death? Why does He wait?

It's impossible to answer the delay question. That's something Yahweh has not revealed. But we're fully aware of why death with its corollary, meaninglessness, exists on this earth. It's a judgment that comes out of the War of Words.

At the very beginning, our Creator spoke to our first parents, Adam and Eve. With His Words, Yahweh placed their personal destiny and the destiny of their race in their hands. Would they have Yahweh's Words as life and truth, or would they believe some other word? That was and remains the big question of this life. Who are you going to believe? What are you going to believe?

Because they chose to believe the voice of Satan the tempter, the judgment contained in Yahweh's Word about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – namely eat it and die – came upon them. By failing to believe the truth, the truth of God's Word came upon them in judgment and upon us, their descendants.

Understand that death doesn't deny God. If anything, it proves that He is real. For death is His judgment against us. Death is a reality because Yahweh is real.

However, death never was the will of our Creator for us. We know this from the words proclaimed about Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:25-26, "25 ... he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death." It's clear that death is God's enemy. It's not His perfect will. It is to be destroyed. That's good news.

We learn from 1 Corinthians 15 that death will be destroyed when all the dead are raised in the resurrection. But to win the resurrection, Jesus first had to win the War of Words that Adam lost. And to do that Jesus had to endure the cross.

Like Adam and like us, Jesus stood between two words. On the one side was the word of Satan the deceiver urging Jesus to do things in some way he chose for Himself. On the other side was the Word of God, written in Moses and the Prophets, prescribing the will of the Father that the Messiah should become the Lamb of God, sacrificed for the sins of the world. Jesus chose the Word of Yahweh and won the War of Words for us all. Therefore, the death of Jesus was no ordinary death. It was the death of death itself.

People often rave against God for putting the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the midst of the Garden of Eden. Why did He do that if knew they would eat of it and die? He did it because He knew that by another tree – the tree of the cross – Messiah would forever open the way to the Tree of Life. That's why we put up crosses in the front of our churches. The cross, an instrument of torture and death, has become the Tree of Life for us because the Son of God gave His life for us upon it.

Therefore, will you have Messiah and His cross? Will you have Messiah's victory for you in the War of Words? That is the most important question of life. Without the cross of Christ you will not only die a physical death, you will be sentenced to

the fire where all those who desire to be free of their Creator for eternity will be granted their heart's desire.

So, whose word will you have in this War of Words? The cynics and skeptics say this is all there is. There is no God. There is no spiritual realm. But, just remember. Skeptics are never skeptical of their skepticism. Cynics are never cynical of their cynicism. On the contrary, they are enthusiastically sure of things they ought to be skeptical and cynical about. Therefore, whose word will you have?

Hear then, the Word of the Lord. Romans 6:2-4, "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Baptism into Jesus Christ is the death of sin and the death of death in us. It is resurrection from the dead. All who are not skeptical of these words, but believe them, have exactly what they say, even though it is not fully apparent now. For this world has not yet been made new. We are still susceptible to the sinful nature and our bodies will die. But because of the cross something is coming that only believers in Jesus Christ expect. It is the definitive answer to "Is this all there is?" It is the new life that can be lived here in the grace of God. It is the new life coming that is promised in the age to come. And the glory of the new age is nowhere better described than in the book of Revelation.

Human beings of all time and all places have recognized that there is an unseen spiritual dimension that has impacted human life on this planet. All peoples know and acknowledge this except those of us in the modern West who have been robbed by the doctrine of Philosophical Naturalism that arbitrarily and adamantly asserts that "this is all there is." Therefore, it's harder for us to look into the book of Revelation. For, the entire book is one long glimpse into the realms that exist unseen. But it is the answer and the antidote to "this is all there is." For it shows us that there is much more – much, much more.

We read in Revelation 1:9-11, "9 I, John, [the Apostle John] your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 On the Lord's Day [Sunday] I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches...."

Being "in the Spirit" is what we call an altered state of consciousness. It's also similar to what we call virtual reality. These days, you can wear a video and audio headset hooked up to a computer that covers your eyes and ears. The device immerses you in a video game as if you were in the real world. If you turn your head, the scene changes before your eyes as it does in reality. Virtual Reality is the best comparison we can make to being "in the Spirit." In the Spirit, God puts a person in His much larger reality. This is what happened to John.

In the book of Revelation, John writes that in the Spirit, Jesus took him on a tour of the heavenly places. Then He showed John things that must happen on earth – dreadful scenes of Judgment upon rebellious humanity that must happen before this age of the world is ended. He then took John to the great Day of the Lord showing

him first the resurrection of all the dead and then the great Judgment where all will have to give account before the Lord. He then showed John the eternal dwelling place of all those who love their rebellion against Yahweh. It's the Lake of burning sulfur. Finally, Jesus brought John to what we saw in the second lesson last week.

Revelation 21:1, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea." John got a first look at the creation Yahweh is preparing for the redeemed. What I find interesting about the new heaven and earth is that there is no sea. The seas of this planet are actually a remnant of God's Judgment against humanity in the great flood of Noah. Thus, this verse tells us there will be no reminder of judgment on God's new earth.

Revelation 21:2, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." Here we see marriage symbolism used for the relationship between God and His people. Are you married to God? Yes, if you're baptized into Christ. Yes, if you're a resident of the new earth.

Rev 21:3, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'" This was God's initial plan in creation. But, Adam and Eve refused it. However, by the choice of Jesus, the Second Adam, it will be reality on the new earth. Thus, the goal of human life is not heaven. It's Yahweh Himself. And where is this dwelling place? It's not in heaven. It's on the new earth. Human beings are meant to live in immortal bodies on a new home planet in a new universe with their Creator. We're not meant to be disembodied spirits floating on the clouds of heaven.

Revelation 21:4, "He [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. 5 He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" The important thing here is that the all judgments God pronounced upon this world in the book of Genesis are gone. Revelation tells us that God will be busy creating once again. He will make an entirely new world for the people of God. And He will be openly present in the new world. He will not hide Himself as He does here. In the glory of His presence as beings made righteous in Christ all the despair of this world will be gone forever.

Revelation 21:6-7, "6 He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.'" As long as we have breath, we will be in a constant War of Words. That war rages even in our own inner beings. This is what must be overcome. It gets much worse when the people of this world demand the acceptance of their words or else. That's persecution. But we have the grace of God going for us and can overcome.

Incidentally, ladies, don't worry about the male language here. Remember we males just saw that we're married to God. The use of son here is universal for all those being redeemed from the human race.

Revelation 21:8, “8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” What I find interesting about this list is that cowards lead it off. To stand on God’s side of the War of Words does take courage. And when you read of the beatings, stonings and other persecutions St. Paul endured you understand why. The people of God are persecuted for only one reason – the Word of God itself. But, the point of these verses is that rebellious people will not be allowed into the city of God. All who dwell in the city of God will be safe forever against rebellion and all thought of rebellion. This is confirmed in Revelation 21:27, Nothing impure will ever enter it [the city of God], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

We conclude with Rev 21:22-27, “22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.”

Christians do not despair because no matter what happens in this life Jesus is our inheritance. Is this universe all there is? It’s not. Therefore, let us break out in a celebration of life, the celebration of our God.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.