

Advent and the Apocalypse

December 4, 2016

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Oh Little Town of Bethlehem

(Here is a song to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer).

Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars
go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting
light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in
thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above
While mortals sleep the angels keep their watch of
wondering love

Oh morning stars together, proclaim thy holy birth.
And praises sing to God the king, and peace to men
on earth.

Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars
go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting
light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in
thee tonight.

Icebreaker

Was there a time when you saw something so beautiful that you weren't able to describe it in words?

Text for Discussion: Revelation 4-5

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

We describe Revelation today as apocalyptic literature, but like many of Paul's letters, it was written to be circulated among the "seven churches that are in Asia" (Rev 1:4). But John also wrote to Christians throughout the Roman world in their varying stages of affliction and comfort. And John's words remain quite relevant to us today. Revelation isn't Christian escapism but rather a very practical letter. If we are honest with ourselves, we don't see the world or our condition as clearly as we'd like to presume. This circumstance-transcending vision is both what needed to be unveiled in John's time but also exactly what we need to see today: God on His throne.

In Revelation 4, John steps into the heavenly throne room. As the apostle Paul writes in 1 Timothy, God "dwells in unapproachable light," in breathtaking beauty and glory. And so John can scarcely put words to God's majesty. There is a sense of transcendence and power that evokes fear in John. God is surrounded by lightning and thunder, while the foreboding, untamable sea is stilled, as tranquil as glass at His feet. The creatures, elders, and angels never cease to worship; there is only One who is worthy. Our God is on His throne.

This vision of the throne room sets the stage for the drama of Revelation 5. A scroll is sealed with seven seals, signifying both its authenticity and the gravity of its contents. It most likely represents the fullness of God's revelation and His purposes for the entirety of creation. No one is found worthy to break the seals and to read its contents, so John weeps. The idea that God's will for humanity might not come to pass – that there might be no respite from suffering nor relief to pain or injustice – is unbearable to him. This possibility would be cause for us to despair too... if it were ultimately true. But in the midst of his weeping, an elder steps forward and declares we have reason for hope. John remembers God's promises, and all of creation holds its collective breath, daring to hope in this, the Advent moment.

John looks up to behold the promised King who carries the hope of the world. Jesus Christ is the One who can approach the throne and read from the scroll. In Him, our salvation is secure, our sins forgiven, our acceptance complete, and our hope made glorious. We, the unworthy ones, are may worthy and will join the choir in worship. This is the very reason we were created!

But why? Why would God do this? Because in His infinite wisdom and with His furious love, God declared that His throne room in all its glory and splendor is still somehow not right without us there, singing for all we are worth.

And so glory came down to us in Jesus, and now, we sing. This is the deepest, truest reality – the vision we all need to see at Christmas.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

What do you need God to unveil in your life during this season?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- 1) After reading Rev 4-5, what stood out to you?
 - What stands out to you in John's description of the throne room?
- 2) The first thing that John sees when he enters the throne room is God seated on the throne. Does that encourage you? Why or why not?
 - What strikes you in the description of what John sees in the throne room?
- 3) In Rev 5 John sees a scroll. What does that signify?
 - John is told that no one is worthy to open the scroll and then starts to weep loudly. Why do you think John weeped?
 - Can you relate to John's sentiments of weeping? What do you fear in your own life? What is God's invitation to you in that?
- 4) **Guiding Question: What do you need God to unveil in your life during this season?**
 - What is the significance of the slain lamb? Does that encourage you? If so, how?
- 5) How can we, as a community, remind each other to bow down in worship to the God who is on the throne?

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Thank God that He sent His one and only Son to die for our sins, so that we can live in eternity with Him.
- Thank God for the beauty and splendor of His creation.
- Pray that during Advent, we would anticipate and yearn for God's unique unveiling in our lives.
- Pray that our imagination would be captured by God's glorious vision and not by the counterfeit dreams that this world entices us with.