**Revelation 8-9, 16**

I. Understanding Revelation’s images and timeline

A. This fits in the “agree to disagree” category of Grace’s Statement of Faith

B. How literal vs. symbolic are the images meant to be taken?

1. Many of the images and many of the numbers appear to be symbolic

(ex: Jesus as a lamb with 7 horns, 4 horsemen, a beast with 7 heads)

2. A faithful reading of a Bible passage is not necessarily the “literal” reading but rather it is the reading that is most in line with how the Biblical author intended us to read it (ex. Jesus doesn’t intend us to read parables as literal historical accounts)

3. In this Revelation series we will not be focusing so much on trying to “decode” the symbols but rather on dealing with the symbols themselves and asking what they teach us about key doctrines (the nature of evil, the nature of judgment, what faithfulness to Christ looks like, etc.)

B. How chronological/linear is the timeline of these chapters

1. It seems that certain chapters take us back in time (ch. 12), and it seems that we come to the end of history several times (7th seal, 7th trumpet, 7th bowl), only to go back around again.

2. In this Revelation series we will not be focusing so much on the precise timing and order of future events as we’ll be asking bigger picture questions about the nature of Christ’s return and what it means to be ready for that.

II. The seals, the trumpets, and the bowls

Darrell Johnson: “There is no refuge from the judge, but there is refuge in the judge”

A. God’s judgment in these chapters starts less severe and builds over time

1. The seals affect ¼, the trumpets affect 1/3, and the bowls are total

2. The fractions are evidence of God’s mercy and patience

See-2 Peter 3:4-9

3. God has a gracious heart that delights not in judgment but in repentance

a. See Luke 15 on the prodigal son and the father’s heart for his son

b. Analogy: As parents, we know what it’s like to warn our children and increase the levels of discipline, but our heart in all that is not to punish them but that they’ll repent and make a good decision

4. God is willing to use pain with the hope that it will lead to repentance

B. The people’s response in these chapters starts less defiant and builds over time

1. Seals: They just want to hide from God (6:15)

2. Trumpets: They “did not repent” of their actions (9:20-21)

3. Bowls: They “refuse to repent” and “curse God” (16:9-10)

4. Two Biblical images for this posture

a. A hard heart (Ps 95:7-8, Ezekiel 36:24-27)

b. A seared conscience (1 Tim 4:2)

C. So the tragedy of this passage is that the people aren’t responding to the increasing pain with repentance, but instead are more deeply entrenched in their defiance

III. Conclusion

A. There is no refuge from the judge, but there is refuge in the judge

B. Sin itself is not the main problem with God

1. God has all sorts of room for sinners

2. Because God loves repentance. He loves when broken people return to him and find his grace

C. Hard heartedness (pride) is the main problem with God

1. Hard heartedness keeps us from repenting and returning to God

2. The question to ask ourselves is not “am I perfect?” but rather “is my heart soft towards God and responsive to him?”

3. One Lithmus test: When I experience the pain of my sin (guilt, consequence, etc.) what do I do next?

a. Do I try to solve the problem in independence from God?

eg. stay busy and distracted, compartmentalize, justify, make resolutions, do penance

b. Or do I turn to God without excuse and false promises to simply experience his grace and mercy and love?

**Discussion Questions**

1. Sunday’s sermon began with a specific perspective on the images and timeline of Revelation. How did that perspective square with your own understanding of Revelation? What in that perspective seemed compelling and what did you struggle with?

2. Treating some of the images and numbers in Revelation as symbols raises concerns for some people. In that regard, how would you respond to someone who says something along these lines: “It’s a slippery slope. If you start saying the images in Revelation are symbols, pretty soon you might be saying the virgin birth, and the miracles of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus itself are merely symbols too.”

3. In the past two weeks, we’ve seen a God who is both a God of judgment and mercy: He is a God who is willing to punish sin and yet he also has the heart of the Father in parable of the prodigal son. What has been helpful for you personally in your life as you try to hold those various aspects of God together?

4. Consider the statement made on Sunday: pain can either draw us closer to God or push us away from him. As you consider your life right now, where might there be pain or challenges that are actually an invitation to draw closer to God?

5. Consider the litmus test offered on Sunday in point III. C. 3: When you are experiencing the initial guilt or consequence of your sin or failure, what is the first move your heart usually makes?