



Thanksgiving
Sermon – November 26, 2017

Verses Covered This Week

Revelation 2:7

Revelation 2:10 - 11

Revelation 2:17

Revelation 2:26

Revelation 3:12

Revelation 3:21

Ephesians 2:6 - 7

Revelation 3:5

So I want you to slide over to the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation. I want to read you part of what was on October 3rd, 1789, it is the original proclamation by George Washington and the congress to institute this weekend. That we've have a time nationally where we would thank God. Now listen to this. Now I'm not going to read the whole thing, but listen to part of it.

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God (which we, of course, don't do anymore), to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor-- and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

He goes on to talk about the beauty of what, of the nation and the fact that God has brought them in. He talks about different things. He says:

One now lately instituted – for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge;

But then down here he makes an interesting statement in the last section of it. He talks about thanking God that we have a government of good, a good government, peace and concord to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue. So the original idea was that we

would set aside a day and we would thank God for what the government has given us in America. Now in that day, as evidenced by George Washington's constant reiteration about God and that He gave this to us and He blessed us with it and the congresses both see, Senate and House, giving in this idea of a joint recommendation that the entire country thank God for what we have in our country because of God creating the government we have. I mean that's the essence of what he writes and what he proposes.

Now in that day it was an easy thing to do. Weren't all the cults. And really basically we were, not everybody was a Christian, I would never intimate that, but the vast majority of the country was Judeo-Christian in its outlook. When you went to New England and you went to the highest part of every city in New England, in 1789, when you went there every high place in every city had a church. Today we have a mall. But every place you went had a church because it really was the centerpiece of our society. And there was this great gratitude for the fact that we had left Europe where you had to worry about religious freedom. If you were Catholic or you were Protestant, you were in trouble. If the king was Protestant and you were Catholic, you were in trouble. I mean you just, it was a nightmare. So they came over here, set up a government that promoted tranquility and blessing under the idea that this book would govern us. As a matter of fact, our founding fathers said, "Without this book our government would turn to turmoil." Well here we are in a day when, we have some good people in our government. One of our own church members here, she is here today, she works in the government. We have a number of people in the federal government. We don't want to say they're all bad. That's just simply how we want to play this. But we have come to a place in this country where the idea of prayer promoted in 1789 is not at all what would be advocated in the public square. We certainly don't believe in the providence of Almighty God. We don't believe He founded this country. We have this concept and we've come to a place where our government, even with good people in it, our government's come to a place where the only thing it can agree upon is increasing the debt. That's it. We don't agree on anything else. Now what that means is your taxes are going up no matter what anybody tells you. You increase the debt; your taxes are going up. That's the only thing the government can agree on. Virtue is out the window. We have no character and class sometimes among the best leaders in our country.

So there's a tendency to kind of look in that day, 1789, and go, "Wow! What a great place we are." But when you pick up a paper today and you read all the junk, you can sometimes find yourself on a thanksgiving weekend going, "You know I'm grateful for my family, grateful for my friends, but really what is there to really be deeply grateful for in this world of incredible insanity?"

So I want to show you. Revelation, chapter 2. We're going to walk through two chapters today. If you know me, that's about four hours. So I know you're going to be grateful for that. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to look at the end of each letter to the churches. The churches disappear in chapter 4 in revelation. But for right now we live in this church age. And I want you to look at what we have that cannot be taken from us; it's ours, it's a guarantee. We don't have it now, but we will one day. These are things no matter how bad you read things in the paper, no matter how tough it gets in America, you can go to bed and say, "You know, God, I've got some great stuff to be thankful for." Here it is. Look at chapter 2, verse 7, last part.

⁷To the one who conquers, I will give to him to eat from the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

What a great statement. It's the first thing he says to the church. He says, "Look here's the deal. You conquer. You stand firm. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to give you to eat from the tree of life in the Paradise of God." Now that doesn't mean much to you and I but it was an incredibly important moment in Genesis. Adam and Eve have sinned, right. Bible says God boots them out and then He says, "We must not allow them," this is what it says in Genesis 3, "to eat from the tree of life." So He puts a cherub there with a flaming sword to prevent Adam and Eve from eating from the Tree of Life. Why? Because if they eat from the tree of life in the condition they're in, they will stay in that condition for eternity and He didn't want that for them. You say, "Well what's the condition?" Listen to me carefully. When they sinned, number one, they lost God, right. They're banished from the Garden and from the paradise. They're kicked out. He's no longer walking with them in the cool of the day every day. Their relationship is lost. Number two: the world's broken. Where before it was perfect, now it's hot, it's cold, it's dangerous, there are animals they used to pet that now they don't dare touch. The world is broken. Number three, their relationship is broken. I'm not employing any humor here, but I can guarantee you when they left that garden, every bad thing that happened was the blame game. Adam would look at her and say, "Why in the world did you listen to the enemy and bring me that apple?" Or the pomegranate, whatever it was. And then her response would be, "Why did you eat with me? Why didn't you exert leadership and stand against what I was doing?" When Cain killed Abel I guarantee you the blame game was there. When they left the garden, the blame game was there. Every time they had pain, the blame game was there. Their relationship with each other is broken and they're damaged in and of themselves. They're depressed. They wear guilt. They wear shame. They're embarrassed. They're broken in four ways and so what God does is, "I don't want you to eat from the tree of life because if you do you're going to live inside those four broken areas for eternity." But when I die and I step into the presence of God, I'm allowed to eat from it because all four of those things are fixed. There's coming a day my relationship with Him is perfect. There's coming a day there's nobody I will meet in heaven I won't like. Even the quarterback for Alabama, I will like him in heaven. I don't like him here, but I will there. No breakdown in relationships. No guilt. No problem. And the world is hospitable and a blessing. So first thing that happens, what I lost here, I get back there.

Now look in chapter 2, verse 10, end of it.

¹⁰I shall give to you the crown of life.

And then he talks about in verse 11:

¹¹The one who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers shall not in any way be injured by the second death.

Now we're going to look at that in another church. But the second thing, I give you the crown of life. What is that? It's the crown that is life. There are two Greek words for crown: *diádēmas* which is a royal crown, *stéphanos*, this Greek word, is a reward crown. This is the word that was used when they wanted to look at grace and they got a *stéphanos*. So the idea is that when you

and I die, we are rewarded with the life that is in God. You say, "Well I have that life now." Yeah, but we have it limited. There are things I don't understand. Things I don't get. Questions that people ask me I have no answer for. When you have a young girl and she can have three or four children by the time she's 19 and you've got a couple that's praying hard and they're Godly and they can't have a child, those are theology questions I can't answer, but when I get there, His life is so clear and so strong, there won't be a single question that can't be answered by that life that I have with Him. The connection will be intense.

Thirdly, look at chapter 2, verse 17. Now watch this.

¹⁷To the one who conquers, I shall give to him one, the hidden manna, two, I shall give to him a white stone, and three, upon this stone a new name written which no one knows except the person who receives it.

So he says three things, right. A hidden manna. Now manna was what they needed to exist. When you and I die, there's a hidden manna that's given to us. I remember Billy Graham when he was preaching full time said something. He loved to play golf and he said something about, "Man I hope there's golf in heaven." And his wife, and there is because the Bible says Paul finished the course. But Billy Graham's statement was, "I hope there's golf in heaven." And his wife had a great insight. She said, "You know, if it takes golf to make you happy, He will give you golf in heaven." The hidden manna: whatever I need, He takes care of. Secondly, a white stone. That's a great one. A white stone was used for two things in the 1st century. This is great. It was used for acquittal. I saw the other day, Pistorius, the guy that's the, he doesn't have any feet, they put the skids on him and he ran the Olympics. He shot and killed his wife. Got six years for it. Judge the other day said, "No, that's not fair." Gave him 15 years which is the maximum sentence allowable in that country. They have no death penalty. I don't remember the time that a judge, in evaluating something, upped the promise, or upped the punishment. But that is exactly what happened. Here's the great thing. You're in this day, you're facing a court, you're facing the death penalty, they come out, they put a white stone in front of you, you're acquitted. Second thing a white stone was for, if you wanted to go to the coolest feast in the day, you came with a white stone. A white stone got you entrance into the coolest feast and it got you acquitted.

When you turn to the book of Revelation, last of the book, we won't go there. Here's what you discover. There's a line of people facing what the Bible calls is the great white throne of judgment. God is sitting on there opening up books and seeing if your name is in the book. That's the metaphor. And so there's a line there and the assumption is going to be, as a matter of fact, it says small and great all people in the world stand in this line. So the assumption is, I'm looking at this line, I'm heading over there, walking over, and suddenly a cherub is going to grab me and pull me aside and say, "No, no, no, no, no. That's not your line. This is your line. You're going into the marriage supper with the Lamb. You're in a different ballgame. Your white stone acquits you from the great white throne of judgment. And it gives you entrance into the greatest, I know this is not the word we want to use, but it's the best description, it gives you the entrance to the greatest party you're ever going to be a part of. And that is the marriage supper of the Lamb where you step in there, the minute you get in there, the Bible says you wear white garments, it's going to mention that in Revelation. You wear white garments. Here's the deal. What that means is the only thing I remember from my time here are the good things I did for Jesus Christ. All the junk

I did for myself, I won't remember a single thing. I'll remember every single good thing I did for Jesus. And I go into a party where the Bible says, as a matter of fact, our Lord made the statement Himself, remember. He said, "After tonight," it was Thursday night, right before He dies on Friday. He said, "After tonight, I will never drink the fruit of this vine until I drink it new with you in the kingdom of God." There will come a day when in this party He serves us. A reminder of what gave us our access. I get a white stone. It gives me entrance into the greatest party ever and it acquits me from the great white throne of judgment.

And then he says, I give you a name that's yours, that nobody else knows but you. Now what in the world does that mean? It's the first time I understood an emotional conundrum that I wrestled with for years in my own life. I've told you before I was saved my Junior year in high school, was called to preach my senior year. Until I understood that verse, I struggled for years because, I don't know any other way to say this except just to be as honest as I can be, I struggled because I had a deeper emotional tie to my call than to my salvation. Which always bothered me because I thought, "What's more important: the call to preach or being saved?" Well obviously it's being saved. And I never could process that until I came to this verse. And then I realized what the deal was. The Bible says, 2 Peter, God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. So God wants every single person on the planet to be saved. So when I'm saved, I'm part of the group. It's a wonderful thing. It's great! I'm forgiven. I don't have to worry about guilt, shame, I know these things are mine when I die. But I'm not singular. I'm part of the group. Everybody has the same thing. But when He called me to preach and said, "I have something for You, particularly to do, that is for you and me alone." There was a particularization of my relationship with Him that I'd never had in my life. I realized I was important to His heart more than just part of the group. There was a singular importance for me to Him. That's what this is about. When you and I die we get everything we need. We get a white stone. We don't go to this line, we got to the party. And at the party we all get a particular name because what God wants us to know; no matter how big the party is, every person is an individual to His heart and to His presence. What a tremendous statement that is.

And then he goes on. Look in chapter 2:26. Now here's, we're going to fly here, now listen.

²⁶The who conquers, and the one who keeps until the end My works, I will give to him, now listen carefully we're going to look at a couple of verses, I will give him authority over the nations, I will shepherd him with the rod, I'm sorry, I will give to him authority over the nations, he shall shepherd them with the rod of iron, like pottery vessels are broken.

And then he talks about I'll give to him the morning star. Then look in chapter 3, verse 12.

¹²The one who conquers, I'll give to him to be a pillar in the temple of my God, he shall not ever go outside again; I shall write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven from My God, and My new name.

And then look down in chapter 3, verse 21.

²¹The one who conquers, I will give to him to sit with Me in My throne, as I have conquered and I have sat down with My Father in His throne.

Now listen carefully to what he says. He says, first of all, we are a pillar in the temple of His God. Now there are two Greek words for temple in the New Testament: *hierón*, which refers to the entirety of the temple, and *naós*, which refers basically to the very center of the Holy of Holies. It's *naós* that's used here. Now listen to what he says. We are a pillar in the very center piece of God's government. Now a pillar does two things. It supports and it's ornamentation. It's never plain. It's always the first thing you see when you step up to a building. You see the columns. You see the pillars. When we die and we leave the party and we step out, the first thing He does is He makes us in the centerpiece of His government, the new Jerusalem, the centerpiece of where He is, He makes us the support columns for His new eternal government and He makes us the ornamentation for that government. Now stay in Revelation. Let me read you something. Listen to Ephesians 2. Now stay where you are. Listen to this.

⁶He's raised us and sat us in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that, now watch this, that He might show forth in the coming ages a superabundant riches or His grace and kindness upon us in Jesus Christ.

The church becomes a pillar in that we are the basis of support for God's eternal government and then we're the ornament that God shows off to the entire creation, the entire universe, of the riches He gave us in Jesus Christ. What a tremendous picture. It talks about the fact that we rule and sit on thrones with Him under His authority. You say, "Well, preacher, what does that mean?" I got nothing. I have no idea. I do know, it does for me this, it wets my appetite for what that does me.

Light travels at 186,000 miles a second. So the nearest star to us is 4 light years away. If it blows up tomorrow, it would be 4 years before we know it, before you'll see it. That's the closest star. We've got the Hubble telescope, right, the Hubble telescope and now we can't even see the end of space. We have no idea where it is. It is vast. He's going to redo it when He comes back. That's what it says. He's going to make a new heaven and a new earth. He's going to redo everything. But if He makes it as vast then as it is now, now here's what I think He does. He rules this eternal massive universe that He controls because you've got galaxies and stars all over the place and they don't bump into each other. He's in control and when He rebuilds this, He takes us, makes us the pillars of the centerpiece of His government and He gives us sections of the universe that we rule under His authority. That's why you crave what you crave. Every single one of us crave two things. We crave relationships because we lost those in the Garden of Eden. And we crave being important. The reason you crave being important is you lost your value in the Garden. You're in His image. You're somebody. He's going to make you somebody and we crave that, but He gives that to us at the end of time. A pillar on the throne, we rule with tremendous authority. And then He says, go back, chapter 3, verse 5.

⁵The one who conquers thus shall be clothed in white garments and I shall not in any way wash his name out of the book of life, and I shall confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

You know what's great? I don't care if you're seven or seventy. Holy Spirit speaks to you, you hear Him, you believe what He says, that you're bad, Jesus wasn't, and that you can have a trade of your sin for Jesus' righteousness, and God will make everything right with you. There's nothing you can do. He makes everything fixed, if you'll do that. Whether you're seven or seventy He writes your name in a way that it's never erased because He doesn't write it in chalk, or pencil, or ink, He writes it in the blood of His Son. And when it's written in that blood, He never erases anything connected to the blood of His Son. It's kind of tough looking around at America today. It's hard to imagine 1789 being the basis of our gratitude today. But here's the great thing. I don't care how bad this world gets. I've got a tree of life coming. I've got a connection with Him coming. I've got a party I'm going to. I've got a jail sentence I'm missing. I've got a personal connection with that God where He and I are connected in a particular way versus anybody else in this room. He'll know every single name. He gives everybody a name. And I'm going to rule on a throne with Him and nothing can stop any of that because He put my name in my junior year in high school and it's still in there. So I'm good to go.

So I would quit trying to base my thanksgiving on what I read in the paper. I'd base my thanksgiving on what I read in the Bible. That's a better deal. Because what I read in the paper is going to change. What I read in the Bible is eternal and true. And the old adage is true. The only Hell I will ever know is the junk I see in the world. And the great thing is, it's coming to an end. But if you don't know Jesus Christ, the America you live in today is the only heaven you're ever going to know. And that is not up to the Father. That choice is up to you.

Let's pray.

Father, again, You wet our appetite for what in the world is coming. We have a skeleton, but we have no idea what that means. Let us trust that, put our thanks in that, and our joy in that, and that we didn't earn it, You gave it to us. That is just plain staggering. Thank You for who You are, what You are, what You do, and how You value us. And that amazingly, Father, You did not start over. You put Your Son on a cross to redeem us. Bring that home to every heart in this room this morning. In Jesus name.