

HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 11/1/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, November 2 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who do not yet believe. Ask God to help you recognize to whom you can be a witness. Seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in sharing your faith with them so that you might one day be able to bring them to the worship of our Lord.*

Of all the books of the Bible, none has caused more confusion than the Book of Revelation (and there's only one. It's not Revelations. It may be big, but there is only one—Revelation.) For centuries, people have tried to interpret Revelation, decipher its message, and figure out what it is telling us.

There are at least four ways to read Revelation. You can read it as though it has already happened and we are living in the time described at the end. You can read it from the perspective that we are in the middle of it and that some things have happened and some are yet to happen. Or, you can read it as though none of it has occurred yet, or is just starting to take place. This is what many people do. They start looking for the signs named in Revelation and when they think they've found one, they say, "See, the end times are coming." This has happened in nearly every generation, especially with signs like the "mark of the beast." People thought that Social Security numbers assigned to people was the mark of the beast. When the small pox vaccine came out, many people ended up with a small scar on their arm, which some claimed was the mark of the beast. There have been many such theories and there will be many more. Hal Lindsay in the 1970's published The Late Great Planet Earth, which explained how everything in Revelation was being fulfilled and that the end was going to be any day now. Of course, Lindsay, whose book was a best-seller, took the profits and bought long-term oceanfront property in southern California, so I guess he was hedging his bets. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins wrote the Left Behind series and many people found the fulfillment of Revelation in them.

The fourth way to read Revelation, and probably the correct one, is symbolically. When it was written late in the first century AD, great persecution had broken out against Christians and it was dangerous to have anything that identified you as a believer. So, Revelation was written in a kind of code that Christians understood but others would read and not be able to make sense of. It was written to give Christians hope and encourage faithfulness during a time when people's lives were threatened if they were thought to be believers. They knew what it meant, but others read it as just some crazy writing. Christians knew that the seven lampstands at the beginning were the seven Christian churches in Asia Minor. The seven-headed beast was Rome that was hunting and killing them like wolf because Rome was built on seven hills. Horns represented power and eyes meant knowledge. Numbers were very important. Three (3) was the number for God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and four (4) was the number for the world (four seasons, four points of the compass, four primary elements, etc.). If you put a zero behind

a number that meant a whole bunch more. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and Jesus was in the wilderness 40 days before being tempted, so the wilderness also represented the world. And when the world (4) cooperated with God (3), you had the number seven (7), meaning perfection. Twelve (3x4) also meant perfection (12 tribes of Israel—Old Testament, and 12 disciples—New Testament). When Revelation talks about 144,000 gathered under the altar of God, it's referring to a whole bunch from the Old Testament (12) times a whole bunch from the New Testament (12), and for believers, it was praising those from both Old and New Testament times who died or were martyred for their faith, and therefore would be gathered at God's altar without judgment. Because when tuning an instrument, the closer you get to in tune, the worse it sounds, the closer you get to seven (7), symbolically, the more evil it is, so six (6) was the number for evil, and three sixes (666) meant divine evil or the devil.

Revelation is filled with symbolism that can be quite meaningful for Christians, even today. But it is not a document to predict when the day of judgment will come. Even Jesus told His followers, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matthew 24:36) So, if even Jesus, the Son, doesn't know, why spend time looking for signs and thinking we can figure it out. It doesn't even matter. Jesus also tells us, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." (Matthew 24:42) Instead, we should do all that we can to make sure our faith is strong and then let God worry about the rest.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey