

Well, in all the months leading up to this announcement we never considered this scenario. But, you know you announce your resignation and then you might as well take your remaining sick days. Plus he only has insurance for another few weeks. Also, in the weeks and months leading up to this announcement we've found jokes keep the tears at bay. Most of us struggle with change because all change is loss. Even good change is a loss. We're all collectively losing what has been most comforting to us for all these years, but the good news is we aren't processing this loss or walking through this loss on our own. We're in this together. And, that's the strength and the beauty of Carbondale. We're in this together as family. In the weeks ahead we'll be sharing how we're also going to be celebrating during this season because we can do 2 things at once – we can be sad and we can celebrate so that's what we're going to do. So, don't make plans for Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup> or Sunday, May 7<sup>th</sup>. More will be shared soon.

But, this morning let's turn our attention to Revelation.

Have you ever listened to say a choir or a piece of live music and think this is the end and begin to clap only to realize nope, it's not finished, there's a reprise? Or, classical music when it's only the end of the first movement and you go to clap only to realize you're so completely uncultured that you're the only one clapping and the rest of the room all seemed to know to wait? Or, the movie ends and the weirdos get up and leave but you stick around as the credits roll – like a normal person – only to discover there was another few seconds of movie the people who don't stay for the credits missed. This is the book of Revelation.

John starts the book describing the risen Jesus in a powerful description that ends with **"I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades!" Revelation 1:18** and we're all like yes – clapping. Only for John to keep going and we realized – oh not the clapping moment okay. We read through 7 letters – everyone of them equal parts encouraging and convicting and we think well that was lovely – and we start to clap. Nope, just movement 2. Then heaven opens and our senses are overwhelmed with John's descriptions and by the time he gets through writing chapter 5 and he's seen the Lion of the Tribe of Judah looking like a lamb that had been slain and everyone singing worthy is the Lamb and worshipping – we're on our feet – this ending is amazing. Oh, no, not the end, sit back down, we've got some weird horses and earthquakes. But, then we get

this incredible scene of those around the throne – people of every nation, tribe, people, language, color – and God is wiping tears from eyes – beautiful – an even better ending than the one before – nope. Not the end. Stop clapping. We’ve got censers and trumpets, plagues and judgement. We make it through that level of strange and we have John eating a book, and then it gets really weird when the dragon shows up. We’re definitely wondering why we haven’t brought this story to an end. It should have ended several chapters back. But, then everyone bursts into song and we’re on our feet again declaring victory and joining in the song of the redeemed. That’s surely the end – nope more judgement, bowls of wrath looking very much like the trumpets. Babylon falls and we’re on our feet singing the hallelujah songs – an ending for the ages. Nope still clapped too early. Weddings, wars, and books, and then Satan forever defeated. We hold our breath. We want to clap – but we’ve been fooled before – so we look around – do you think this is the end? Then we read the opening of chapter 21. It’s the final reprise. When we get to the end of this movement it really is the end. It will be time for the standing ovation. But, there’s lots in the reprise – about 3 weeks worth. In fact, the last couple chapters of Revelation really just retell and reinforce what he wrote in the letters to the churches at the beginning. The middle bit – the confusing part that has kept many of us from bothering to read this book for years – it was all just fleshing out what John said would happen to the churches and what he saw happen by the end.

We’ve seen so much of the story of Revelation repeated over and over. So much has happened, in fact, that we forget what was at the start of the book. The introductory letters to the seven churches who initially received this vision. Each of those letters contained a description of Jesus that John would use again in the book. And, then each letter either commended them for something they were doing well in keeping the faith or spoke to them of coming difficulties and persecution, or brought conviction and a call to repentance – that’s the whole middle bit of Revelation – explaining in great detail what those difficulties would look like and what happens to those who keep their eyes on the Lamb and what would happen to those who did not heed the conviction of the Holy Spirit and did not repent. Then each letter ended saying what those who overcame stood to inherit and the book ends with those exact things being inherited by the whole church.

Have I confused you? Turns out Inigo Montoya was wrong – the sum up was too much – let me go ahead and explain.

### **What did the 7 churches stand to inherit?**

Revelation begins with John on the island of Patmos. He's there in exile because of his commitment to the Word of God and his testimony of Jesus. He knows what he's talking about when he speaks of persecution and difficulties and not pledging allegiance to the culture, the empire or the government of his day. One Sunday as he prays the Holy Spirit comes to him and begins to show him all sorts of things. He hears a loud voice tell him, **“Write on a scroll what you see and hear and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”**

**Revelation 1:11** He begins with specific introductions to each of the churches in these 7 cities, but the entire book of Revelation is what he saw and heard and sent to them. It wasn't these 7 letters and then somehow they got tagged onto the real book. The vision John sees was sent to the churches.

Each church is told something different about what they would inherit – specifically if they overcame. **John wrote to the church in**

**Ephesus – the overcomers will eat from the tree of life**

He wrote to

**Smyrna – the overcomers will not be hurt by the second death**

**Pergamum – the overcomes will be given a new name**

**Thyatira – the overcomers will be given authority over the nations, He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery. The overcomers will also be given the morning star**

**Sardis – the overcomers will be dressed in white and never have their names blotted out from the book of life**

**Philadelphia – the overcomers will have the name of God written on them and they'll dwell forever with God in the new city that is coming down out of heaven**

Lastly,

**Laodicea – the overcomers will sit on the throne with Jesus and reign with Him**

When God makes everything new we're told, **“To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all**

**this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” Revelation 21:6-7** And, then we begin to see all that those who have overcome – overcome the beast, and Babylon, and idolatry. Who have kept themselves pure and not worshipped the beast but the Lamb – we see all that they now inherit.

**Those who inherited were given:**

**Robes made white in the blood of the Lamb and made of fine linen, bright and clean - 7:14, 19:8 (Sardis)**

**Marriage feast of food not sacrificed to idols - 19:9 (Pergamum)**

This may well be hidden manna. It's food prepared for God's people by God himself.

**Opportunity to reign with Jesus - He will rule them with an iron scepter - 19:15 (Thyatira)**

This is in chapter 19. The verse quoted twice by John is from Psalm 2 which the Jews and all of John's readers knew was a Messianic psalm.

**A place to dwell forever with God in the new Jerusalem coming out of heaven from God - 21:2 (Philadelphia)**

**Escape from the second death which was a fiery lake of burning sulfur - 21:8 (Smyrna)**

**Life as a pillar in the very presence of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb who have now become the temple - 21:22 (Philadelphia)**

**Name written in the Lamb's book of Life - 21:27 (Sardis)**

**Food from the Tree of Life which is constantly producing - 22:2 (Ephesus)**

**A new name written on us - and it's the name of the Lamb - 22:4 (Pergamum and Philadelphia)**

**We reign with Christ for ever and ever - 22:5 (Thyatira and Laodicea)**

**The right to the tree of life and the right to go through the gates to the city - 22:14 (Ephesus)**

**If all of this isn't enough, we also are given Jesus in the form of the bright Morning Star - 22:16 (Thyatira)**

The Bible has been pointing us to this with its reminders that we are joint heirs with Christ, we are seated with Him in heavenly places, if we suffer with Him we will also reign with

Him, and every spiritual blessing is now available to us through Christ Jesus. And, the end of Revelation shows us exactly what this will look like.

I don't know what you stand to inherit here on earth but this is way better. I mean I love pottery, but food prepared by God to feast on? When I was a kid mom and dad bought this lovely dining room table and it filled the dining room at the parsonage over here. If you had all the leaves in the table in it put someone out of the room and into the little entry way. The table came with this thick protective pad that would sit on the table to keep it from getting scratched, stained, or scorched from setting someone too hot directly on the table. My mom has faithfully kept that table protected and it looks exactly the same as it did almost 40 years ago when they bought it. She's recovered the chairs and then bought new chairs over the years – but the table is pristine. A few years back I finally said – mom if you're keeping this table protected for me or Bek you can stop. Take the cover off and enjoy your table cause no one wants your table. It's become this joke now. I'll show up for thanksgiving and say – are we not using placemats today? Just set your drink directly on the table, Sarah, cause no one wants my table! Here's the thing – use it all up here – I don't want your table because I'm inheriting way more that will last for all eternity. I'm getting a new name, I'm reigning with Christ, I'm dwelling in His presence forever, I'll never be hungry or in need again, and I'll be dressed in garments made clean by the blood of the Lamb. Use that table – my inheritance is in heaven.

Well,

### **What did the church have to overcome so they could inherit all this?**

Ephesus was to not forget their first love – don't let your love for God lessen as the years of serving Jesus go by. As we move into this new season at Carbondale I think these lessons are timely. Our first love isn't Carbondale – though it's a close second for me – but Jesus is our first love. He's the head of the Church. We're not going to let change in our church lessen our love for Jesus. And, we're not going to let 90 years of being a church here at Carbondale be the time where we slow down or start to fall down on the job of caring for one another, reaching our community, or sending our support to missionaries around the world.

Later John said those who overcome did not love their own lives so much as to shrink from death. In the face of change and challenge the church continues to move forward loving Jesus and overcoming through Jesus.

John wrote to Smyrna – don't be afraid of persecution and suffering but be faithful in spite of it. No matter what comes will we be found faithful? In chapter 13 the beast comes out of the sea and begins persecuting the people of God and we're told some will go into captivity – imagine John writing this down while captive – going mmhmmm I know that's true – but then he says this calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. Folks we have to keep persevering, keep going, keep the faith.

Pergamum was told to remain true to the Lord and His name and not go after false teaching and idols and sinful ways – specifically sexual immorality. At the end of Revelation we find these are the ones who do not escape and are sent to a fiery lake – those who were vile, sexually immoral, practicing magic arts, or idolaters. Instead, Pergamum is encouraged to remain true to the name of Jesus and not renounce their faith in Him. Again, will we at Carbondale commit to remain pure in the way we live our lives? To not give in to false teaching that preaches a gospel without a cross? To remain pure in our theology, our sexuality, and our worship of the Lamb?

Thyatira was told to remain faithful and not give in to the ways of the world and the sin around them. They're told to not put up with or tolerate anything the culture around them is offering if it is going to mislead the church. Jesus says He knows the deeds of this church – and some but not all – were too tolerant of Babylon and enjoyed all the city and the empire had to offer. But those who do so will not enter heaven.

Sardis apparently has a reputation of looking alive on the outside when they're actually dead so the church is told to wake up and to repent – and to keep themselves pure. I don't want Carbondale to look good on the outside to those who know us in our community but when they come in they find a church rotting from hidden sinful behaviors. We want to be found pure and ready – clean inside and out – because it's to the church at Sardis that Jesus says He'll come like a thief. This is the time to make ourselves ready because there may not be any more time than this minute.

Philadelphia is told to endure patiently and those who overcome will have the name of God written on them and they'll dwell forever with God in the new city that is coming down out

of heaven. These are those who in the end did not take the mark of the beast – they didn't identify with the empire or get swayed by the beast or the dragon. Instead these are the ones we see in chapter 20 who were killed for their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God – the exact same reasons John has been exiled. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. Their thoughts and their deeds were pure and loyal to the Lamb.

Lastly, Laodicea is told to remain useful in service to the Lord and those who overcome will sit on the throne with Jesus. It's Laodicea that is compared to lukewarm water which is good for nothing – it's not cold to drink or hot to clean with – it's just been left to sit at room temperature. It's taken on the flavor of what's around it. This is what was meant in 21:8 when he mentions the cowardly won't inherit – their faith is empty – it wasn't worth anything at all.

This is the story revealed in the pages of Revelation. Carbondale, let's keep Jesus as our first love. Let's keep building on the firm foundation we sang about this morning – we've built our lives on Jesus. Let's not give in to the sin around us or the sin within. I'm just going to be as honest as I know how to be and I am nothing if not honest - these next few months the temptation to gossip is going to be off the charts. I'm telling you now – if you hear someone say – well I heard – you can say well that hasn't been said from the pulpit and then end that conversation. Every person in this room – from the pastors, staff, church board, and any visitors who arrived on an odd Sunday – we all know the exact same information – it was what Pastor shared in the video. So, when you're tempted to gossip – instead would you pray for our church, pray for our board, pray for our pastors. Would you pray that we would remain united around the purpose and mission of our church – to be a place of healing, hope, laughter, and peace. Would you pray that we would keep ourselves pure, to remain holy, to keep worshipping Jesus, to keep our eyes on the Lamb? Would you pray that we would be found faithful if Jesus comes back before a new pastor is voted on? Would you pray that Jesus would protect us from the enemy who wants to divide us and pick us off during this time. The enemy wants nothing more than for us to stop going to church because we were only going because of Phil. It's not the same so we stopped meeting together, we stopped acting like the church. May we be found faithful, and pure, and living according to His Word. May we be found still fulfilling the commission Jesus gave

us to make disciples – still serving our purpose and not growing lukewarm. The church of Jesus Christ will overcome the world and the sin inside of it and the persecution of the saints. They'll do that in each generation until Jesus returns. John was told at the end of his vision – **“Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.” Revelation 22:10-11**

When the prophet Daniel was given some equally crazy dreams and visions hundreds of years before John, he was told to seal up his vision because it wasn't for his day – it was all still to come. But, John is told to leave it open. We're all supposed to be reading it and learning from it and putting it into practice. We've said all along in this series – John's readers didn't read this letter and think oh good that's for 2023, carry on! No, they recognized the warnings, they heeded the call to repent, they heard the encouragement to keep going and persevere, and they rejoiced in the hope it brought them that there was victory ahead. They continued to do right and to live holy lives in the face of persecution and a corrupt culture all around them. May we do the same.

**How will each generation be able to overcome and inherit? We will overcome by keeping our eyes on the Lamb who never changed.**

Each letter gave a differing description of Jesus, but we see them all a second time.

**The One who holds 7 stars and walks among the 7 lamps (Ephesus) is also the First and the Last (Smyrna). He has a sharp, double-edged sword (Pergamum) which comes from His mouth. He has eyes which blaze like fire and feet like burnished bronze (Thyatira). He is the one from whom the 7- fold spirit of God is sent (Sardis), and He holds the key to David's throne (Philadelphia). He is the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation (Laodicea).**

From the opening of Revelation Jesus has declared, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” Revelation 1:8**

John turned to see the voice **“And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was**



**white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance...Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." Revelation 1:12-18**

John next saw Jesus in the throne room, **"See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed...Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." Revelation 5:5-6**

Later, John saw Jesus again, this time He was the bridegroom leading the battle against the enemy, the beast. **"There before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God...Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword." Revelation 19:11-15**

And, then the Lamb, has the final word, and announces, **"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End...I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." Revelation 22:12-13, 16**

This is the Jesus who has captured our attention, whom we adore, and to whom all glory and honor is due. This is the one to whom we sing worthy is the Lamb. This is the one we worship with shouts of Hallelujah, the Lamb has overcome. This depiction of Jesus is what we keep in our mind and heart for the days, and weeks, and years to come as we long for His return. This is the Jesus we pledge our lives to and commit as a church to continue serving, together, until He calls us home.

Jesus has not changed. From the beginning, through the middle, and all the way to the end – the book of Revelation has been about the Lamb. If you've learned nothing else from this

study I hope what you hear in your heart each time you read Revelation is this – find the Lamb. Keep your eyes on the Lamb. Because the whole book has been about Him.

I don't know what all this year will bring for us as a church, but I know Jesus and I know He is with us and I know we must commit to fix our eyes on the Lamb and not get distracted – not even by the holy work of choosing a pastor – we must keep our eyes on the Lamb.

Remain faithful.

These are the words Jesus sent to His church – you can read them in Revelation – and to the ones who overcome there is much to inherit. So, to the one who has an ear, let us hear what the Spirit says to the church.

Let's pray