

7 Easter

2 June 2019

I'll warn you right at the beginning that this is going to be another one of those sermons in which I tell you what's missing from our readings.

To get right to the point, if you look at the citation for our second reading, you'll see that a few verses are missing. For some reason, we don't get to read verses 15, 18 and 19 in today's selection from Revelation.

What's kind of amazing is that the verses that are missing are among some of the most famous, or rather infamous, verses in the New Testament.

What's missing are some difficult words. What's missing are some words that have caused a good deal of misunderstanding.

The problem is, in trying to avoid misunderstanding - in trying to avoid some difficult words - we end up losing an opportunity for an incredible insight into what's going on with John of Patmos' Book of Revelation.

Here is the reading from Revelation as John of Patmos intended it to be read:

READ REVELATION 22:12 - 21 FROM A BIBLE

Those are difficult words that "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

There has been an incredible amount of misunderstanding associated with the warning to "everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

The difficult words are just that - difficult words that indicate that even in God's perfected re-creation of creation, there will still be some who are outside the glorious city of light.

It is sad.

Sad to the point of being heartbreaking and tragic that even when God's full vision for creation is finally realized, there will be those people who insist on resisting God's life-giving gifts.

Some people continue to love the darkness. They prefer to love darkness and dishonesty. They prefer to work in the shadows, behind people's backs. Even when God's glory becomes fully present in creation, it's almost impossible to imagine, but there will still be some people who prefer to work behind the scenes, in the shadows, trying to draw others into their schemes.

Those are some difficult words, but it is a tragic truth. A tragic truth which we simply cannot ignore.

But, what concerns me the most is that in the attempt to avoid misunderstanding - in avoiding verses 18 and 19 which speak of adding words to the book of Revelation or taking words away from the book of Revelation, we miss out on an incredible insight.

An insight into what the Book of Revelation itself is accomplishing in bringing about God's kingdom.

Basically, by avoiding or omitting those verses about the curse on those that omit any part of the book, there's no way for us to witness the parallel that John is drawing with the Old Testament.

One thing that's certain about John's book of Revelation is that time and again it calls upon the Torah, the first 5 books of the Old Testament.

John knew his scripture. There's no doubt about that.

So, it's not at all a coincidence that John would use the same language to describe his work as what we read in the Book of Deuteronomy. In fact, John is making an incredibly bold statement. John is without a doubt drawing a direct comparison between the book that he has written and one of the key books attributed to Moses.

Said to have been written by Moses himself, Deuteronomy chapter 4 says, just like we find in John's book of Revelation, that you must not add anything to, or take anything away from what is written.

But, what we have to understand is the fundamental difference between what is written - what is written in Deuteronomy and what is written in Revelation.

Deuteronomy contains the list of statutes and ordinances - the list of all the laws the Jews are supposed to live by.

Revelation presents us with a vision - a vision of God's ultimate plan for God's creation.

Deuteronomy presents us with a legal code - a long list of do's and don'ts.

Revelation presents us with an image - an image of a new Jerusalem filled with light and a river of life. Revelation presents us with the image of the tree of life with its fruit for every month and its leaves for the healing of the nations. Revelation presents us with a God who will wipe away every tear.

Deuteronomy gives us no choice - no say in the matter. It just presents us with all the many laws that God himself laid down and the punishments for breaking those laws.

Revelation reveals to us something that is in one way really easy, but in another way really difficult.

You see, Revelation reveals to us the simplicity of God's plan. God's plan is a plan for life.

And yet, Revelation also reveals to us the sad, tragic truth, that there are some who even at the end, refuse to accept life.

But, think about this for a moment - even those people who stand outside the gate of the city of light, those people who have chosen the darkness rather than the light - those people are standing outside a gate that is always open.

And what sweeter words can there be to end the vision of God's ultimate plan: "let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift." Certainly there should be some sort of penalty for tampering with such an incredible vision.

And in the end, it is Jesus himself who speaks to John. And it is Jesus who promises: "'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen."