

**Oregon City United Methodist Church**  
**18955 S. South End Road**  
**Oregon City, OR 97045**

**Rev. Michael Benischek**  
**503-522-9807**  
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**Series: REVELATION**  
**Sermon: City of Gold**

**Hebrews 11:13-16**

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

**Revelation 21:1-7**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. 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."

**Sermon**

We were traveling down to grandma and grandpa's house - a good 8-9 hour drive - I was around 10 years of age. Already it had been a trip of nightmares. We were going down in one of those station wagons that were popular back in the day, with the wood panels on the side - the family truckster. All of our stuff on top. My mom and her two sisters in the front, and 7 kids in the back, rolling around without seatbelts. One kid got sick, and we had that mess and smell. We had the coffee can. With that number of kids, they didn't want to stop everyone someone needed to stop, and so we had the coffee can. Use your imagination. It had a lid - not that it helped much. We got lost trying to get thru Kansas City thru a not so pretty part of town. Car broke down just outside of town - and a good samaritan stopped to help these three ladies and their crazy kids out. Back on the road, but now we're starving. One kid went missing at a state park where we had lunch. Found him, and then it was time to get back on the road. I was laying in the back on my front, with my feet towards the back, and my Angie slammed the back door, happy to have all of the kids stuffed in the car, and my toes were just dangling out enough - and they got slammed in the door as well. Lots of blood, lots of pain. With my head next to a coffee can that did not smell like coffee. You've had trips like this, right? For the love of God, just get us there. Is all of this suffering worth it? Hours later, we pulled around the last bend in the road where we could see grandma's house. She lived in the mountains and had a pool. And for whatever reason, we started singing Alabama's "Mountain Music" as loud as we could - with joy and gusto - "Oh, Play Me Some Mountain Music, that Grandma and Grandpa used to play." It was a new song back then. We were just so happy to reach the journey's end.

That was vacation. Some journeys are more difficult. And more serious. Hundreds of years before Christ, the nation, or what used to be the nation of Israel, was in exile in a foreign land. Jews in the exile expected a chosen one to come and return them to their homeland. They were surprised when that one was Cyrus, a foreign King. It was not who they expected. Jews in the Roman empire expected a chosen one to come and overthrow the Emperor. A baby came instead, lying in a manger. The Disciples saw their Savior as one who would usher in the Kingdom of Heaven. They were surprised when their Savior ended up hanging on a cross to die. Many times, we do not understand what true power is. As we look at Revelation, we discover who truly has the power of the world in their hands, no matter what it looks like down here. In Revelation there is an expectation of the one that would be powerful enough to open the seals. The lion was expected, but there is a surprise when it is the Lamb. Of course, this lamb is Jesus.

Years ago, Newsweek had an interesting article, "Visions of Jesus: How Jews, Muslims and Buddhists View Him." Although Jesus is not considered the Son of God in these religions, the article tried to show how He is still greatly revered in them.

For example, the Muslims recognize Jesus as a great prophet. They even acknowledge that He was born of a virgin and ascended into heaven. Yet Mohammed, though lacking such characteristics, still is regarded as their greatest prophet.

The Jews have gained a greater admiration of Jesus in recent times, viewing Him as a Great Reformer within Judaism. But they conclude that His followers mistakenly began to worship Him, thereby establishing a new religion-something they say He didn't want.

The Hindus regard Jesus as a virtuous man. Like Ghandi, many are drawn to Him because of His compassion for others.

The Buddhists point out the striking similarities between Jesus and Buddha. One teacher of their faith even maintains that Buddha and Jesus are brothers in spirit, who taught that the highest form of human understanding is universal love.

However, it is the central element in the Christian view of Jesus that creates the stumbling block for all other religions: His violent death on a cruel cross of shame.

A Buddhist leader writes, "Clearly, the cross is what separates the Christ of Christianity from every other Jesus. In Judaism there is no precedent for a Messiah who dies, much less as a criminal as Jesus did. In Islam, the story of Jesus' death is rejected as an affront to Allah himself. Hindus can accept only a Jesus who passes into peaceful samadhi, a yogi who escapes the degradation of death. There is, in short, no room in other religions for a Christ who experiences the full burden of mortal existence-and hence there is no reason to believe in him as the divine Son whom the Father resurrects from the dead." There is no way that you could kill God. God wouldn't allow it. God is too powerful.

Paul put it this way, "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). So you see, Christ's shameful death on the cross is utterly unique to Christianity. Christians celebrate, lift high, even glory in the cross. From the second century onward, the cross for Christians has been drawn, painted, and engraved as the central symbol of the faith-many of us even make the sign of the cross in tribute to the One who died for us. The significance of the cross, essentially, is seen as God's power to overcome suffering and death. The cross is God's supreme instrument in redeeming fallen humanity.

You see, God's solution to the problem of suffering and evil is not to eliminate it, nor to be insulated from it. God's solution to the problem of suffering and evil is to participate in it and transform it into the redemption of

humankind. In the cross God takes terrible tragedy and turns it into triumph! In the cross God takes a loss and turns it into a lesson for life! In the cross God takes pain and turns it into something promising!

God overcame evil not through passive resignation or brute strength, not through coy coercion, or a dazzling display of force. God overcame evil by the power of suffering love. So you see, God uses suffering redemptively to accomplish His will and purpose in this world. His suffering love. If Christ is anything, He is love. And love is a strange thing. It is the most powerful emotion we have. It is love that makes us sacrifice for each other.

An orphaned boy was living with his grandmother when their house caught fire. The grandmother, trying to get upstairs to rescue the boy, perished in the flames. The boy's cries for help were finally answered by a man who climbed an iron drainpipe and came back down with the boy hanging tightly to his neck.

Several weeks later, a public hearing was held to determine who would receive custody of the child. A farmer, a teacher, and the town's wealthiest citizen all gave the reasons they felt they should be chosen to give the boy a home. But as they talked, the lad's eyes remained focused on the floor. Then a stranger walked to the front and slowly took his hands from his pockets, revealing severe scars on them. As the crowd gasped, the boy cried out in recognition. This was the man who had saved his life. His hands had been burned when he climbed the hot pipe. With a leap the boy threw his arms around the man's neck and held on for dear life. The other men silently walked away, leaving the boy and his rescuer alone. Those marred hands had settled the issue.

Today we celebrate the saints who have gone before us. Some of them lived wonderful, long lives. Some may have had shorter time, and a harder road to travel. But they persevered to the journey's end. I remember a woman who shared her gardening story: "Just a few weeks ago, my husband and I made a compost pile. We put all sorts of garbage in it-cracked eggshells, darkened banana peels, piles of rotten leaves and grass-you name it. We mixed it all together and then covered it up. And when you go near it now, believe me, your nose knows it's there!

But next spring when we use it in our garden, what's decaying garbage now will be pure gold. That compost will be so much better than any fertilizer we can buy at a store." Then she continued, "There has been lots of garbage in my life-rotten things done to me and rotten things I've done in response. For years I refused to deal with the garbage, but several years ago when my life began to unravel I was forced to. Thank God for that. As a result, He has worked to bring so much healing and restoration in my life."

"But while all this has been going on, I have often found myself thinking, 'I can't wait until this is finally over. I'll be so glad when I can put all the garbage behind me and never have to think about it again. Maybe I'll even be able to pretend it never happened.'

"Then as we were making the compost pile, the Lord spoke to me: 'All your life you've run from your garbage. Now even though you're finally dealing with it and receiving healing, you're still wanting to run from it. But don't you see? I not only want to heal and free you from the effects of the garbage in your life; I want to use your garbage. Like the garbage in your compost pile, if you'll let me, I'll turn it into gold--pure gold. Just offer it to Me.'"

This friends is the message of the cross that has practical lasting effects. Oh sure, we know that through the cross we receive eternal salvation. Our sins are forgiven and we are united spiritually with our Savior. But the full message of the cross is that it offers healing and wholeness even for the garbage of our lives!

The message I have for you today is this: The journey is worth it. A life of faith has its rewards. The saints can rest from their labors. Their destination has been reached. Yes, we miss them. Those on this side of the vale

carry the sorrow of their passing. But for those on the other side, we believe what Revelation has taught us. There is no more tear, no more suffering. No more want or hunger or pain, or war, or death.

One more story: San Francisco is home to hundreds of little stores that sell both worthless junk and valuable antiques. Savvy shoppers can find some real treasures among all the debris. One day an antique connoisseur walked into one of these stores. Browsing the items for sale, he came across an unremarkable cat drinking milk from a saucer on the floor. The man immediately recognized this saucer as genuine Ming Dynasty, worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. And here it was on the floor, with a cat drinking milk out of it! The shop owner obviously did not know its worth. Immediately, the man started scheming how to get it for cheap, without the shopkeeper knowing what he was selling. He turned to the shopkeeper and said, "You know, that's a very striking cat you have there. I'd really like to buy your cat."

"Well," answered the shopkeeper, "the cat is not really for sale."

"I insist," the man replied. "Would you take \$200 for the cat?"

"That's very generous," said the shopkeeper with a shake of his head. "I don't think this cat is worth \$200, but if you want the cat that badly, you can have it."

The man paid for the cat and then, as if he'd just thought of it, said, "Oh, one more thing. I'm going to need something to use as a feeding dish for the cat, so I'll give you another \$5 for that little saucer there on the floor."

"Oh, I could never do that," said the shopkeeper. "You see, that's no ordinary saucer. That's a piece of rare china from the Ming Dynasty and its worth is incalculable. But amazingly enough, ever since I started feeding my cats out of it, I've sold 12 cats."

That shopkeeper degraded something of great value to upgrade the worth of his cats. God also used something of great value to redeem us and to give us life--Christ, who was degraded on the cross so that we could be upgraded to eternal life. As a result, we have become priceless treasures.

On the other hand, customers who didn't know any better walked by the cat's milk dish without realizing that they were walking past a treasure. Next time you walk past what look like ordinary persons, don't be fooled. They're treasures--people God loves so much that he sacrificed his Son on their behalf so that they may have eternal life. How does the book of Revelation end? With Amens. And Hallelujahs, And here is the very last verse of the entire Bible: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen." And the family of God said, AMEN.