

INTRODUCTION: THE “NEW NORMAL”

As many of you know, I was up with family this week. This is the first time I’ve seen my oldest sister since she’s gone through cancer treatment. It’s been Heather, by nature, is very curious, and very industrious. That translates to a life of learning new things and always being busy.

I don’t have to tell anyone who has gone through, or knows about cancer treatment, that it has a way of slowing you down... dramatically. Heather is just at the point she’s understanding that. Reflecting on her schedule she said to me, ‘I have to settle on a “new normal.”’ We know what she means by that; she is going to readjust what she expects to do in a day, what will be the overall mentality for her life. -And that’s what we’re talking about today: **WHAT’S THE ‘NORMAL’ FOR YOUR LIFE?**

That’s what chapter 22 is all about in the book of Revelation. What is the ‘normal’ in all aspects of your life; and more directly, what is the ‘normal’ in your spiritual life? -Because that ripples through every other aspect of life. And to those transformed by God and being transformed by God, the question fits: **WHAT’S THE ‘NEW NORMAL’ IN YOUR LIFE?**

Obviously, the chapter talks about far more than that, we’ll go deeper into overall treasures of this chapter in the evening message. But for this morning, that’s the big question, now let me set up the context for the question.

We already learned there is really nothing new in Revelation, it speaks in the apocalyptic language of the Old Testament. It merges Old Testament teaching with established New Testament revelation. It follows the protocol of other prophetic writing, and one of those protocols is a blessing and a warning on those who would address it.

Question: Who would be the vast majority of people addressing a prophetic book? -Those who have some investment in the religious and spiritual; people like us! -So the danger of its curse and the potential of its blessing are aimed squarely at us. So, let’s look at how blessings and curses fit in with our “normal.”

BLESSINGS AND CURSES

Let’s start with this qualifier, the curses don’t have to do with how we fail by times, at trying to follow God. And likewise, the blessings aren’t for those who occasionally do something right. They deal with what is the norm of our lives: **WHAT WE ACCEPT AS ACCEPTABLE.**

So from what a God-professing person considers to be the acceptable norm, what brings God’s blessings?

BLESSINGS

- “Blessed is the one who **keeps** the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.” (v. 7)
- Let the one who **does** right continue to do right...to be holy. (v. 11)
- Blessed are those who **wash** their robes... (V. 14)

Revelation encapsulates the entire Bible, chapter 22 is the encapsulation of Revelation, and it can be summed up with this: The guarantee of God’s blessing is in this-

1. Keep the Word
2. Do Right
3. Wash your robe.

It so easy to memorize, and we Christians can be so good at that! We pat ourselves on the back if we commit a little something to memory. -And that IS good; but it doesn't mean anything more than the meaning we understand; so what does it mean??

KEEP THE WORDS

What exactly are we keeping?

In the original Greek, the word used here, is more than just syllables that pass one's lips. John uses the word "logos." "Logos" is what Jesus is. "Logos" is the reasoning, motive, computation, and the divine expression of God.

It's easy to say, "love one another." And on the surface, not too hard to understand; be friendly, give a hug, feel a little warm and fuzzy.

But the "logos" of those words is what sent Christ to the Cross. The reasoning, and divine expression has moved people to strange lands with hostile people in a desire to save their eternities. The "logos" of those words cause a servant of Christ to reach out even when it is hard or risky. You cannot "love" as God means love, unless God Himself is transforming you to His own heart.

What the blessed keep is far more than correct doctrine, as important as that is; they are keeping the motive and prime objective that's behind the teaching, and to be honest, church people aren't all that good at that. We tend to lose the forest for the trees all the time.

Well if "logos" is basically the heart and will of God; what does it mean to "KEEP"?

The original word used by John (tay-reh'-o) means to guard against injury or loss by keeping one's eye upon it. It doesn't mean to prevent from escaping, that's another word.

So we know this about the blessed: They are plugged in beyond the teaching of God, they are plugged into the heart and soul behind the teaching. They keep their eye on the main thing and don't allow it to be injured or lost. -That's a lot deeper than memorizing some words, isn't it? That helps explain the next item of the blessed.

DO RIGHT

John says the "dik'-ah-yos" continue "dik'-ah-yo'-o"; the righteous continue DOING righteousness. It's not enough to know what is right. It's not a blessing to simply, not do wrong. The blessing lies in being active in what is right. -And the action of "right" is linked to the character of "holy." "Right" is to do what God does because you have the nature of God in you. Holiness is having the nature of God in you. There is no genuine "right" without holiness; anything else is a hollow knock-off.

WASH YOUR ROBE

We've found this imagery all through the book of Revelation.

- They church of Sardis didn't defile their robes even under persecution. (3:4)
- Those who were martyred for their faith were given robes of white. (6:11)
- Those who washed their robes white in the blood of the lamb. (7:14)
- Jesus Himself, is clothed in a special robe.

So, what does the robe represent? -It is more than clothing, it is the identity and essence of the person. It is all that their lives have stood for. In effect, the robe is what you really are.

So, what does it mean to WASH one's identity and essence?

We've looked at this word before (plooo'-no). To "plunge" as in; to submerge one's clothing to launder it. Have you ever kept the lid open on a conventional washing machine? When that agitator gets going, it pulls the cloths under and drives them back and forth over and over. It is an extremely active and aggressive process!

Just put this imagery together; the very essence of who you are... the life you lead and the values you follow, are plunged into the essence of Christ and swished back and forth until only what is cleaned remains. Does that sound like a very thorough process to you? Does it sound like a deeply committed process?

If you are like me, you've probably grew up with the concept that if a person gets overly committed to any one thing, they are fanatical. -So let's not be religious fanatics and get too committed! ...I understand that there are some real "wack-jobs" out there, but for a long time I had a problem reconciling this. The Scripture is all about commitment, but I don't want to be a "fanatic"! -But upon closer examination, I found that most fanaticism, especially in Christianity has absolutely nothing to do with level of commitment, but the level of imbalance. Scripture is a wonderfully balanced template; fanaticism develops when we take a death-grip on one portion of truth at the expense of the other. I'd encourage you to reflect on this: In following Christ, there is no level of commitment that is "fanatical", only a level of balance.

The overriding problem in the church community is not that we are "over-washed", it's that we try to skip directly to the drier and expect a religious "bounce sheet" to do the trick.

To "wash one's robe" is really to do the first two processes: keep the words, and then live up to them as the norm for your life. It is your "normal."

CURSES

What is disturbing about the people of God's final curse, is that it has its greatest meaning among "religious" people. It is directed at those who are using, or at least, addressing the Word of God in some way.

- If anyone adds anything to them... (V. 18) (epitithemi)
- If anyone takes words away... (V. 19) (aphaireo)

First, let's keep in mind that it isn't just a case of adding or taking from Revelation. A main discovery of this study has been that Revelation encapsulates ALL Scripture, so to take away from this revelation is to take away from the Bible as a whole. That being said...

How might the religious person ADD to Scripture?

It's interesting to know that the Greek word (epitithemi) doesn't just mean an addition, it can mean, to impose, in either in friendliness or hostility.

When Joseph Smith created Mormonism, he added a whole new book of religious teaching. And when Charles Russell began the Jehovah's Witnesses, he added a new translation of Scripture (New World Translation) to set the strategic points of his system. And we could go on to mention other dramatic cases of adding to Scripture. But, what about us? Do well intending Christians ever "add to Scripture"?

Question: Have you ever received an email that said something to the effect, "Send this prayer/ email/ angel; to 10 people and receive a blessing"? -Someone has just added to Scripture. Whenever we utilize some loose inference to God that cannot be supported by Scripture, we have just added to Scripture.

When we throw salt over the left shoulder when we spill some, we are adding to Scripture; no matter how we dress it up; 21st Century tech or medieval superstition, it is adding to Scripture. If it is the acceptable norm of our lives, we have something to be concerned about. If we want blessing; we learn and plunge into the "logos" of Scripture, we don't add to it, even if it seems like an innocent little thing.

How might we TAKE AWAY?

The Greek here, (af-ahee-reh'-o) means to remove, to cut off, or to smite.

There are at least two common ways we might "take away."

Compromise-

It isn't just in our time; there has always been the pressure to set aside what you know from God's Word so you don't rock the boat. That is three quarters of the letters to the seven churches we covered in the first chapters.

Here's the thing; compromise is inevitable if the would-be Christian doesn't understand the "logos" of God.

When trying to explain God's idea of love as the meat of the Christian faith, the apostle Paul says this:

(NIV) ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. (1 Corinthians 13:7)

I've come to this conclusion; the main reason people grow fast and loose with God's Word, or even leave faith all together is because they try to navigate the world of a twenty year-old with the spiritual understanding of a ten year-old, or the challenges of a thirty or forty year-old spouse and parent with the spiritual understanding of an eighteen year-old.

Compromise, the temptation to turn a blind eye to God and His Word are always there. The only way to continue is to have a reason more compelling than the temptation. A second trait is closely related to this one...

Spiritual laziness-

It is a temptation to submit what we already know; but is also possible to not know at all; and that is no excuse.

Consider this:

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

(1 Corinthians 1:18)

For those "being saved", the Word of God is "the POWER of God."

And in case you're wondering; yes, the word for "Word" here is "logos." It is not just knowing some Bible words, it is knowing the heart and soul behind the words. ...No Word- no power; no power- no God, in any true form anyway.

BACK TO THE QUESTION

There is much more going on in this final chapter of God's Word, but this is definitely a major theme.

God says there is the danger of a curse or the potential of great blessing.

It comes down to our original question: what do you accept as your "NORMAL"?

There is an "old normal" we've all lived it. The fallen nature plods along quite comfortably in it. And there is a "new normal." God has stated the blessed and cursed versions of it.

We need to challenge ourselves in this way:

- **We need to look at how we normally live, the actions, the attitudes, the hobbies, the values, the routines, the spirit, and the heart... we need to look and ask:**
- **WHAT IS MY "NORMAL"?**