“The Battle of Good and Evil”
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Most classical symphonies have three or four movements, one major theme, and other minor themes that seek to dominate the major theme. My wife thinks I’m crazy when I listen to a symphony because I try to identify the battle between the major theme and the minor themes. Take for example Dvorak’s *New World Symphony, Symphony No. 9 in E minor*.

Dvorak came to America to be the director of the National Conservatory of Music of America from 1892 to 1895. When he arrived, Dvorak saw the Statue of Liberty, completed in 1886 just six years earlier. That’s why I chose the Statue for the front cover of today’s bulletin. He became inspired by the idea of freedom. He completed *New World* in 1893, and it premiered at Carnegie Hall. After each movement, the audience stood to applaud, not allowing Dvorak to continue as usual. The applause was so thunderous that he had to turn around and bow just to get them to stop so he could continue with the next movement.

Some think *New World* is the most popular musical composition in the world along with Beethoven’s 5th and Handel’s Messiah. (I know that I did not include Mozart or Vivaldi or Verdi or Bach or Chopin or Wagner or Strauss or Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninoff or Bernstein.)

Dvorak wanted to hear folk songs. Harry Burleigh, an African-American singer and composer in New York City, sang hundreds of black spirituals to him, and Dvorak used many of them. The most famous part of *New World* is called “Going Home.” Listen to it.

**Note:** During this place in the sermon, the first two minutes of Dvorak’s ’Going Home’ (from Movement 2 of the New World Symphony) was played. You may search for the YouTube clip for yourself.

I think it’s my favorite melody in the whole world, but it’s not the major theme of New World. Here’s the major theme, first established in the opening movement, and then re-established in the last movement. Listen for the major theme. You have to wait for it.

**Note:** During this place in the sermon, the first three minutes of Dvorak’s *New World Symphony* (Movement 1) was played. You may search for the YouTube clip for yourself.
I believe the rest of Revelation is a symphony with four movements and two major themes, creation and redemption. This is God’s musical message to each of us about unfailing love and everlasting protection and ultimate victory. There are battles, but the major themes will win.

Here’s the first movement, chapters six to eleven.

**Movement #1: The Reality of Evil and the Reality of God (chapters 6 to 11)**

In Chapter Six, we are introduced to the four horses and their riders - white, red, black, and pale – the pictures of power, war, famine, and death. One has a crown of conquest; one has the power to make people kill each other; one forces people to cheat each other with wages; and the last one is named death with Hades close behind.

Those who suffer cry out.

**Revelation 6:10 NIV**

10 They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”

In response, we hear a theme at the end of chapter six, the wrath of God:

**Revelation 6:15-17**

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?”

The great day of wrath will come. Judgment is part of God’s plan for the world. Although evil exists, the Lamb has redeemed us. Christ will take care of believers.

In chapter seven, the picture of the 144,000 is revealed, maybe referring to the mystery of God’s intention for his children founded in God’s promise to Abraham, but at the end of the chapter, the redemption theme is established again - even though evil exists.

**Revelation 7:9-10**

9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”
Judgment will be terrible, but salvation belongs to God and the Lamb. The songs make it clear. Listen to the last verse of chapter 7.

Revelation 7:17
17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

The Lamb is our shepherd. As the eighth chapter begins, the seventh seal is opened.

Revelation 8:1
1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

The Lamb took the scroll (chapter five), opened it, and broke all of the seals. Then seven angels with seven trumpets appeared and had announcements. First, there was silence, and now there will be sound, lots of sound.

Revelation 8:5
5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Even though the Lamb is the shepherd and even though God will take care of us through the day of judgment, evil will still try to have its way. Evil is a minor theme in this first movement, but evil will not win.

Revelation 8:13
13 As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”

Stars will fall from the sky. Locusts will torture, and one of them will be called the Destroyer. Many will die. Plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur will cover the earth. Those who needed to repent, did not. Oh, my!

Revelation 9:21
21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.
Although judgment is coming, many will ignore the signs. People will continue to worship false gods and carry on with sinfulness.

But another opportunity is given to the people facing judgment. John saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven with a little scroll in his hand – the little book with sweetness like honey and bitterness because it is truth.

**Revelation 11:1**

> I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers.

Even those in the inner circle will be judged. God’s measuring rod will be used. There is no other standard, no other norm, no other way. God is the only judge.

The first movement ends with a song from heaven about the kingdom of God.

**Revelation 11:15**

> The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

> “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

There are two realities: the presence of evil and the presence of God’s power. Oh, my.

**Movement #2: The Cosmic Battle (chapters 12 to 18)**

Although God has great power, evil does continue. The battle of good and evil that the seven churches can see for themselves is also a cosmic battle.

You heard it in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians just read to you.

**Ephesians 6:12**

> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

You can also read about the cosmic battle at the end of Romans 8.

**Romans 8:38-39**
For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In chapters 12-18 of Revelation, we are introduced to many images of evil, all seeking to win the cosmic battle against Almighty God and the Lamb, but through it all, songs of victory are sung. Every chapter has a moment of praise to God. Here are the images of evil.

Chapter 12: The woman, the serpent, and the dragon
Chapter 13: The beast out of the sea and the second beast coming from earth
Chapter 14: Babylon the Great
Chapter 15: The seven plagues to punish evil
Chapter 16: The seven bowls of wrath are poured out
Chapter 17: The woman on the scarlet beast - the mother of prostitutes
Chapter 18: The judgment of Babylon and the three woes

The cosmic battle ends as chapter 18 concludes:

Revelation 18:21-24
21 Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: “With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. 22 The music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. 23 The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world’s important people. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. 24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of God’s holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.”

Oh, my! I’ve got to say it again: Oh, my!

Next Sunday, we get to say “Hallelujah.” The third movement of the symphony begins with chapter nineteen and continues to the chapter twenty with clarity about the final judgment.

The fourth movement and final movement is the announcement of the new heaven and the new earth, chapters twenty one and twenty two. The major themes of creation and redemption will be re-established again.

What can we say about movements one and two?
Despite evil on earth and evil in cosmic realms, God is still in control and God will work out plans for our future.

Although at times it seems hopeless, the major themes of creation and redemption give us the stability we need in a reckless world.

In about 68 AD, the seven churches in Asia Minor certainly lived in a world without stability. The Roman Empire was out of control. Nero did whatever he wanted to do without review. Those Christians felt the sting of Caesar.

It wouldn’t be difficult to name Nero the serpent, the beast, and the dragon. Personally, I think it’s sufficient to say 2,000 years ago, they faced evil in their world.

Today, we face evil in our world. I’m grateful for the Book of Revelation, and I’m thankful for all of the songs. In each chapter, right after we are introduced to another evil beast, someone somewhere sings a song of praise to God.

There are frightening things in chapters 12 to 18, but there is also great comfort.

Our God is our Shepherd, the Mighty One, and the Lord who loves us dearly.

The Creator and the Redeemer are in charge of the final judgment and the final reckoning.

Thanks be to God!

The people in the seven churches were not alone, and neither are we alone today.

Let us pray.