

If you didn't pick up a set of Revelation bookmarks last week, you can still do so today. They have prayers, reflections, and extra reading suggestions. You'll find them in the lobby and online at the homepage of our website.

Last week we learned that despite the many frightening images in John's Revelation, this vision is intended to be an unveiling of hope to a persecuted people by revealing Christ's sovereign majesty and power over all creation. We also were reminded by the letter to the church in Laodicea that Jesus is looking for followers who are more than just indifferent to the Gospel. Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart today. Will you leave him standing outside, or invite him in?

This morning we're going to bask in the images of God's majestic throne room as they're portrayed in chapters four and five of John's vision. As we do so, I invite you to accept that the history of interpretation of Revelation has always been diverse, and still today there are many different approaches that have been popular. I'm not going to try to describe those or pigeon-hole my own approach. Let it suffice to say that when we get into the details of the symbology of Revelation, there's almost always at least three or four different opinions. The key is to not get lost in the details and to remember the purpose of the vision: to unveil hope to a persecuted people by revealing Christ's sovereign majesty and power over all creation.

Throne room visions like this one aren't unique to Revelation. We find them in 1 Kings 22 (19), Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, and Daniel 7 (9). In Isaiah, we find that memorable scene of God asking from the throne, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" and Isaiah answering, "Here I am. Send me."<sup>1</sup>

In Revelation, as in all throne room visions, the throne represents power, control, and especially sovereignty, which you'll remember is the royal power and right to rule. The throne is never empty, as in this image, because an empty throne would be anything but hopeful, suggesting an absent king. Although the description of the figure on the throne is often scant, the king of these visions in Scripture is always God, who in Revelation 4 is

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 6:8, New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

heralded as “the Almighty” and the one who “created all things.”<sup>2</sup>

It’s significant that the throne is located in the center of the scene. Everything emanates from the throne. In other words, everything proceeds from the sovereign rule of God Almighty. The revelation of God’s power and might are accentuated by thunder and lightning, perhaps inviting a deliberate comparison to God’s revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai.<sup>3</sup>

Near the throne of the Almighty are arrayed seven torches. Recall that in ancient Jewish numerology, seven often represents completeness or perfection. John describes these as “the sevenfold Spirit of God,”<sup>4</sup> which we might reasonably take to mean the perfect and omnipresent Holy Spirit. Who are the 24 elders on the thrones? Probably not old white guys with beards, although that’s certainly the image one usually finds in art. Some suggest that the 24 refer to the twelve apostles of Christ and the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>5</sup> Maybe a more helpful and general interpretation is that they represent the Saints, those who have died and been judged faithful and have received the promised reward of ruling with Christ in restored Kingdom of God. As I mentioned last week, by faith, that could be you or me. The decision is really ours.

The creatures in the throne room are especially peculiar, aren’t they? “Four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight.”<sup>6</sup> The eyeballs all over their bodies is pretty creepy, right? Try to get past that, because this is just a strange way of conveying omniscience- all knowing, or all seeing. They bear some resemblance to the description of the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and the seraphim of Isaiah 6.<sup>7</sup> Whether they represent some class of spiritual beings that we’re unaware of, or they’re more generally representative of God’s creation, their function in this vision is to continually declare God’s holiness, worthiness, glory, honor, and power. You could think of

---

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 4:8, 11. Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 19, 20. David Aune, Word Biblical Commentary (52a), p. 314.

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 4:5. New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

<sup>5</sup> David Aune, Word Biblical Commentary (52a), p. 314.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 4:7. New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

<sup>7</sup> Steve Greg (ed). Revelation: Four Views, p. 91.

them as the original praise band.

We've seen God the Father and the Spirit, so now it's time for us to meet the Son. I'm reading from Revelation 5, beginning with verse 1, in the New Living Translation.

**{Read Revelation 5:1-14 NLT}**

Let's start unpacking this part of the vision by addressing the scroll. If you're wondering what a seal is, it was probably something like this- a piece of string with a melted wax blob with an impression pressed into the wax before it hardened. The purpose of a seal is to prevent anyone from reading the scroll who the author didn't intend read it. Why seven seals? Again, probably to convey the idea that the subject matter of the scroll is perfect, complete, and all encompassing. In this case, we know by reading ahead that the scroll concerns God's will for completing the transformation of creation from the present order to the restored Kingdom of God.

Don't miss the importance of what's happening here. John, an exile because of his faith in Christ, receives a vision of God on the divine throne, about to exercise the divine will and plan for restoring creation. That was an enormously hopeful image for John, and it can be for us today as well. Let's face it, with each passing day it sometimes appears that this world is simply falling apart around us, and it can be really hard to sustain our hope. The spiritual reality, however, is quite different. The Kingdom of God is even now being ushered in, and was waiting only for the one worthy of unsealing the scroll.

From our vantage point in history, we know that person has arrived. The Jewish expectation of the Messiah was that of a ruler from the tribe of Judah who would rule like a lion- an apex predator, the most powerful king. The reference to that image of God comes from Genesis 49:9, where we read, "Judah, my son, is a young lion that has finished eating its prey. Like a lion he crouches and lies down; like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?"<sup>8</sup> But the question raised by the angel is not "Who is strong enough to open the scroll," but rather "Who is worthy?"<sup>9</sup> So it's not the figure of a lion who receives the scroll, but that of a slaughtered lamb.

If you've read your Bible, you're accustomed to the image of Christ as a slaughtered

---

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 49:9 New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 5:2. Ibid

lamb, the Passover sacrifice originally offered so that the angel of death would “pass over” the homes of the Hebrew captives in Egypt.<sup>10</sup> We associate that meal with Christ, because it was the Passover meal that Jesus celebrated with his disciples in the Upper Room, that Thursday night before he was betrayed and crucified, when he shared the pattern of what we now know as the Lord’s Supper.<sup>11</sup> A slaughtered lamb is quite a contrast with a victorious lion, and one that could easily be mistaken as weak, ineffective, and done for.

Perhaps that’s why John gives us this vision of the Lamb instead, sporting seven eyes and seven horns to clearly proclaim Christ’s omniscience and omnipotence. In a way, it’s a graphic way to say that Jesus is God. Jesus is the risen Christ, anointed one of God, who reigns in heaven with the Father and the Spirit. His death on a cross, far from defeating him, uniquely empowers him to be worthy of unsealing the scroll. It’s the crucified but now risen Christ who will personally oversee the completion of God’s perfect will, ushering in the restored and eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven is coming. In some respects, it’s here now, but there obviously remains plenty of brokenness to mend and evil to judge. Christ will be faithful to complete what his Father began.

What’s the image of God that you’re relating to most now, or perhaps needing most? Our crucified savior is anything but a weak lamb, but His approach to righting wrongs is often hard to accept. Wouldn’t things seem so much easier if Jesus immediately descended from the clouds as a lion and took care of everything that needed to be done? Quickly, powerfully, and decisively? There are days when I feel weary in my soul, and I do pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, come.”

What the Scriptures give us instead is more mysterious. Victory against evil comes not through force or powerful speech but through sacrifice of self and total commitment to seeking the Kingdom of Heaven. It comes not through strength, but through worthiness. The good news is that while none of us are worthy, we worship the one who is. “Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered— to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.”

---

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 11:4-6

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-39; John 13:1-38

Please take some time now to reflect on Christ's worthiness.



**Bill Reinhart, Pastor**  
[pastorbill@buffaloumc.com](mailto:pastorbill@buffaloumc.com)