

Introduction:

- A. [Recitation of Rev. 5]. That is an astonishing passage of Scripture, but let me ask you, why does that matter to us? What practical use is it? Is this sort of like when we vacation to Mt. Rushmore, or the Lincoln Monument or the Grand Canyon, a spiritual overlook where we see something moving before we head back to our jobs on Monday? Nice place to visit, but it isn't where I live. Why do we need to hear that description of what goes on on the other side of heaven's door?
- B. Just before these two chapters of the Bible, Rev. 4-5, Jesus spoke to seven ordinary churches, and everything he said was practical; Monday through Friday stuff; what they were doing right and what they were doing wrong. Let me remind you of some of the things he said, because of course, he is still saying them:
- *"You have forsaken your first love."* Was he talking to you?
 - *"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer."* Was he talking to you?
 - You are compromising with the world and accepting sexual immorality as though it were good. Was he talking to you?
 - *"You have a reputation for being alive; but you are dead."* Was he talking to you?
 - *"I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and not denied my name."* Was he talking to you?
 - *"I know your deeds, that they are neither hot nor cold... so I am about to spit you out of my mouth."* Was he talking to you?
- C. I imagine Jesus looking across his churches, looking at each one of us as his disciples, seeing all these different things in us, and thinking, "What can I do to help them be true to me, to trust me, to love me?" He said to the last of those seven churches, the one whose deeds were tasteless and tepid, *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me."* It is a disconcerting sight—Jesus standing outside of one of his own churches knocking, calling, wanting to come in and dine with us.
- Then, it is as if he says, "Here I am knocking on your door, but let me show you what is behind my door. Let me show you what is going on in heaven right now, and what will take place in the days to come. Maybe that will change the way you think. Maybe that will restore your love for me, strengthen you in your weakness, deter you from sin."
- D. So last Sunday, in Rev. 4, we went through the doorway to heaven where we saw, first, the stupendous vision of Almighty God upon his throne attended by astonishing heavenly beings and surrounded by jewel-like beauty, a thundering atmosphere, and ceaseless songs of worship. And now, as we return to this picture in Rev. 5, the plot thickens. **Rev. 5:1-4...**

People think we are facing a crisis here in our economy and in the turmoil of the world around us, but John saw a crisis of far more epic proportions. We're meant to see that, too.

I. THE LORD WANTS US TO SEE THAT THE REAL CRISIS WOULD BE A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE FACED GOD'S JUDGMENT WITH NO HOPE (5:1-4)

- A. That scroll, bearing writing on both sides, and sealed along its edge with seven seals, has the attention of heaven. We're never told what is actually written on this scroll, but the context of this book tells us that this scroll was a kind of contract—an official document from God—**authorizing a conclusion to human history where justice is done but repentant rebels are pardoned, where the world is destroyed but a new world is recreated.** God had made this plan and recorded it, as it were, in a contract, but it could not be enacted; it couldn't go into effect. Those seven seals could only be broken by someone authorized to break them, someone who had a right to conclude the contract God had written, and no one could be found. That is a crisis!

- B. John grasped what very few people would. If that scroll cannot be unsealed, if that contract cannot be completed, if justice cannot ultimately be done in this dark, wicked world and mercy cannot be granted to people who are all guilty criminals against God, then all is lost. There is no hope. Dante imagined that there is a sign over the gates of hell which reads, *“Abandon hope, all who enter here.”* If this scroll cannot be opened, that sign could hang over the doors of maternity wards. John wept for good reason!

II. THE LORD WANTS US TO SEE THE MOST AMAZING CONQUEROR STEP FORWARD (5:5-8)

- A. **V.5...** I knew it! I knew the Messiah King God had promised would be our hero, and here he is! We know he is the Messiah God promised because he is *“the Lion of the tribe of Judah.”* The Bible said he’d be a descendant of the lion-like Judah, and that Judah would be the father of Israel’s king—the Lion King. The Bible also said he would be both the *root* and the *branch* of David. We could never quite imagine how David could grow from the Messiah who had not yet come, but we knew he would be descended from David. Talk about a royal pedigree! Of course, he *“has triumphed”!* He is the warrior King we were promised; the one we have long awaited. He’ll grind our enemies under his heel! Of course, *“he is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”*
- B. We turn to see this conquering Messiah, this Lion King, but look what we see: v.6a: “Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain...” At first glance, that is a pitiful picture. But read on: **vv.6b-7...** The slain Lamb is a *person!* Israel had never quite imagined that, even though Isaiah had written, *“the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all,”* and *“he was led like a lamb to the slaughter.”* How can a Lamb be the Lion of Judah!? How can a *slain* lamb be the Root of David—the one from whom Israel’s shepherd came? And look where he is: *“standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders,”* yet he also comes to that same throne and takes that scroll from *“the right hand of him who sat on the throne.”* Was there a switcheroo when we weren’t looking? How could the *man* who descended from Judah and gave life to David, be both the slain Lamb and also God himself!? Wait! There’s more: *“He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”* Seven horns, the perfect number, is a symbolic way of saying he is omnipotent—all powerful. And the seven eyes symbolize that he is omniscient—all-knowing. And it says those omniscient eyes *are* the perfect Spirit of God. Aiy!! This is mind-boggling! How can all these qualities be true of one Man?!
- C. But sure enough, he is the One! **Rev. 5:8...** Those harps and bowls of incense tell us that this conquering Lamb is the reason we sing and the answer to our prayers. Oh, you may watch the news and want to go hide under the covers, but we have every reason to lift our heads and sing. You may get your bank statement and feel like humming a funeral dirge, but God reminds us as believers that we are people of the harp and song. And *“the prayers of the saints”*—that’s us, you know—are *“golden bowls full of incense”* when they reach heaven. All our prayers—our thoughts of God, our grateful praises, our desperate pleas, our heartaches put to words, our persistent requests—they are all fragrant to God, not because they’re eloquent, but because they speak of our trust in him—our hope, our faith, our love for him.

The great worshippers of heaven with their golden crowns and voices like great waterfalls now sing a new song. The Greek word for *new* means a *new kind* of song, a new category. Gospel! This is a gospel song sung to the Lamb of God. **Vv.9-10...**

III. THE LORD WANTS US TO SEE THAT JESUS CHRIST COULD OPEN GOD’S SCROLL BECAUSE HE REDEEMED ENSLAVED SINNERS (5:9-10)

That is why Jesus Christ is worthy to open the God’s scroll. Remember, the scroll contains God’s contract authorizing a conclusion to human history where justice is done but repentant rebels are rescued, where the world is destroyed but a new world is recreated. Jesus Christ did that and it required both a warrior and sacrifice, it required weakness and omnipotence, it required a man who was God.

A. Christ was slain to purchase people for God (v.9). Human beings were enslaved three times over—to **Satan** because this dark world where we live is his domain, **to sin** because we were born with it deep-set in our natures, and **to God's justice**, for we had offended him by our constant rebellion, and under arrest and facing condemnation. Slaves of Satan and sin, captives to the justice of God. But when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead he *"purchased people for God with his blood."* He redeemed us—bought us out of Satan's grip, gave us an antidote to the dark spiritual DNA of our sin nature and secured for us a "get-out-of-jail-free" card from God's judgment by bearing that judgment himself in our place.

But note this: in buying us out of slavery, he purchased us "for God." Paul tells us that we are not our own; we were bought with a price. Jesus wants those whose love is cooling to see that, those who compromise with sin, those whose deeds are neither hot nor cold. We are not our own. We were bought with a price. We were purchased for God. Yet what happy news that is! Who could ever hope for a better Lord or sweeter service!

B. What's more, he has purchased people for God "from every tribe and language and people and nation." We hear in those words the endless variety of culture and custom, but to God, it meant the endless variety of sin and rebellion. People sin in every language. Every nation is lost. Yet *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son."* It is the will of God that no one be excluded from his grace, that every kind of people be part of his Kingdom.

C. But Christ has accomplished more still. He has not only purchased people for God, he has not only extended that redeeming blood to every kind of people, but once he redeems us he makes something of us! **V.10:** *"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."* Now stop and think about this a minute. Paul was right on the button when he observed in 1 Cor. 1:26, *"Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."* But here we're told that we are God's kingdom and that we will actually *reign* on earth—the new earth, which God will recreate. We will wear crowns!

What's more, the text says Jesus makes us priests. Priests serve God, and act as his intermediaries to others. Priests are sanctioned to handle holy things, to come near to the Lord, to go out on his divine assignments. Peter tells us that *right now* we are a *"royal priesthood."* So how should we then *live*?! Remember who you are! Royalty! Priests of Almighty God!

IV. THE LORD WANTS US TO SEE THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS EARNED THE PRAISE OF HEAVEN AND EARTH (5:11-14)

A. The picture in these concluding verses is one where every creature God has made from the highest angels even to the most soul-less demons cannot help but worship Jesus Christ, because he is not only worthy by right to open the scroll, but he is worthy by right to receive perfect worship from all that God has made. **Vv.11-14...** Silence from any quarter, any corner of God's creation, would rob Christ of his due. The Lord shows us all this, and then turns to us as his church to see how we will respond; to see how we will change, persevere, love; how we will worship him.

Conclusion:

The Lord tells us all this now, while we're living in this dark and frightened world, so that we might shine, so that we might pray and sing with confidence and joy, so that we might not grieve like others, nor fear what others fear, nor lose hope. We are not to get through these times by being merely tough or stoic. We are to live in these days as children of the light, people who do not fear the future, who know that our God reigns and that he will take care of us, come hell or high water.

- Rekindle your love for Jesus Christ.
- Do not be afraid when you must suffer hard times.
- Stop sinning and be pure.

- Open your door to Jesus so he can come in and dine with you.