

**“And Then I Saw; And Then I Heard”
Revelation 5:1-5, 11-12**

- 1** Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.
- 2** And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice,
“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”
- 3** But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.
- 4** I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.
- 5** Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”
- 6** Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.
The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.
- 7** He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.
- 8** And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people.
- 9** And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
- 10** You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”
- 11** Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.
- 12** In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”
- 13** Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”
- 14** The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Introduction

Beethoven’s Ninth and last is known as the Choral Symphony. It was the first of its kind in 1824 when he added four vocal soloists and a huge chorus in the final movement. The 2006 movie “Copying Beethoven” has a moving final scene of its first performance. “Freude, schöner Götterfunken, Tochter aus Elysium” (from Friedrich Schiller’s “An die Freude -Ode to Joy”). “Joy, the beautiful spark of divinity, the daughter of eternal life” sings the famous melody. Our hymn has it: “Joyful, joyful, We Adore Thee.”

I say Beethoven’s was the first of its kind in symphonic composition. But, the Book of Revelation looks and sounds to me like a Choral Symphony. The symphony moves through images of judgment and salvation, despair and hope, themes of worship and warning. Choral ascriptions of praise burst forth in Revelation chapters 4 with “Holy, holy, holy,” chapter 5 “You are worthy,” 7 “Praise and glory,” 11 “And he shall reign forever and ever,” 12 “The kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah,” 15 “Great and marvelous are your deeds,” and chapter 19 the great “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong

to our God.” I want to sing all of them! I hope you do when you read these passages.

The apostle John records all of this, the Word of God for us in sight and sound. As we look at this visionary scripture, listen and look for what the Risen Lord Jesus is saying to the people of God, the saints, the elders, the church.

I. He is Able

“Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.” The throne room of Almighty God is described in Revelation 4. Here John sees God holding a book, a scroll in his right hand.

In the ancient world, literature was written on papyrus, single 8”x10” sheets then joined together and rolled up. The Gospel of Matthew would be about 30 feet long; Revelation about 15 feet rolled up into a scroll. Papyrus was expensive, so quite often writing would be on both sides. The scroll on God’s hand was sealed with seven seals (a common practice) to make quite certain that no unauthorized person could possibly open it, likely to guard God’s final settlement of the affairs in all human history.

Then a mighty angel was proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” And John wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. “No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll.”

Revelation was written at a time when the early church was under heavy persecution. The first organized Roman persecution of Christians was ordered by Emperor Nero in 64 A.D. ... The last was the Diocletian or Great Persecution starting in 303 A.D. Christians were systematically stripped of legal rights and commanded to worship Roman gods.

Saint Valentine of Rome was a priest and bishop who ministered to persecuted Christians. He was martyred on February 14 after refusing to renounce Jesus as Lord. Saint Valentine's Day has been celebrated since about 500 A.D.

Persecution of Christians continues in many parts of the world today. It says that John wept and wept. Christians and their loved ones continue to weep over the harshness of persecution. We all yearn for the day when Christ settles accounts and makes all the wrongs right.

Then, with the dramatic tension at a breaking point, the Good News Gospel breaks through. One of the elders said to John, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

There is One who is able; able to right every wrong, able to turn the shadow of death into daybreak, able to be Lion of Judah and Lamb of God at the same time. In light of the persecution of the church, Jesus’ name isn’t mentioned in the vision. But the church knew who the One is who is able to open the scroll.

In “Dogmatics in Outline,” Karl Barth summarizes his careful, exhaustive writings of theology. “Tell me how it stands with your Christology, and I shall tell you who you are.” In other words, tell me what you believe about Jesus and I’ll tell you where you stand with the God who created you and seeks to redeem you. Barth says, “This is the point at which ways diverge” regarding “revelation and reason... God’s truth and man’s truth... At this point everything becomes clear or unclear, bright or dark.”

Jesus is the One who is able. As Peter wrote with a strong Hebraic feel, “For you know that you were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (I Peter 1:18-20).

II. Glory

Pastor friend Dave Peterson told of preparing his sermon when his little daughter came in and asked, “Daddy, can we play?” “I’m awfully sorry, sweetheart, but I’m right in the middle of writing my sermon. In about an hour I can play,” her dad said. “OK,” she said. “And when you’re finished, I’m gonna give you a great big hug.” She went to the door of the study, then did a U-turn and came back and hugged her dad.

Teasing her, he said, “You said you were going to give me a hug *after* I finished.” “I know. Now you know what you have to look forward to!”

God wants us to know, throughout his word, how much we have to look forward to in the great coming of Christ.

“Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders... He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people.”

As you read the book of Revelation, read it as a visionary experience. Imagine a huge wall-to-wall canvass covering the front of the sanctuary. John is pointing out everything he sees in the painting. ‘Look over there! A rainbow shining like an emerald encircling the throne... Look! A Lamb looking like it had been slain, but is alive... And there! Four living creatures, each with six wings and covered with eyes... Oh, and there! Twenty-four elders dressed in white with crowns of gold on their heads...’

Don’t be concerned about identifying each symbol or the sequence of visionary parts. Simply get the overall feeling, the impact of God’s hope in the midst of living in this fallen world. Occasionally, John gives us the interpretation. The golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the people of God. This we can say: your prayers, our prayers, the prayers of persecuted believers today are held close to the throne of God, collected as a burning sacrifice of prayer and praise.

Then John looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and

ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Then he heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped. And so should we.

Conclusion

For the Aztec people, Mictlan was the place where nearly all mortals went when they died, said to be peaceful and full of flowers and dancing. Valhalla is the heaven-like place where the souls of fallen warriors are taken in Norse mythology. The ultimate destination for souls who have achieved moksha, or “salvation,” Vaikuntha is the highest of heavens in Hinduism. Souls are granted love and fellowship with Vishnu, the supreme god, lasting for eternity.

The Celtic Otherworld is located on Earth, somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, an island or chain of islands where sickness, old age, famine, war, and all other evils of the world are banished. Native Americans, Australian Aboriginals, ethnic groups all around the world have their version of heaven.

Roman philosopher Seneca, said, “The day you fear as the last is the birthday of eternity.” It seems that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal, that this world isn’t all there is.

What John saw and heard in the Revelation nails it down for us. Jesus is the Almighty and Ever-living God. With the elders and all of heaven, we also sing the Choral Symphony, a new song to the Lord Jesus: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Pastor Earl Palmer wrote of Revelation 5, “Whatever may come, we have met the One who gives all of history, your life and mine, meaning and hope. As the seven seals are opened, we must not forget: The Lion/Lamb has won the battle.”

Let us pray together.

I Corinthians 15:12-20

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from

the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.