

Worthy is the Lamb
Revelation 5
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When the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation and in particular this 5th chapter - what do you suppose he expected his first readers to do as a result of it?
When they read chapter 5 what would be their response?

To answer that, remember who was first reading it: These were Christians.
What was happening in their lives at that time in history?:
They lived under constant threat for their livelihood and even their safety.
Christians were unwelcome in those cities.

So John wrote to encourage those Christians and all Christians through the ages who would face temptation to give up or give in.
Is it worth it to be a Christ-follower?
Is the final outcome worth the price paid to get there?
And even if Christians persevere, how do they know the outcome will be what they hope for?

John wrote to show us the end - how all history would finally come out.
1:1 "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place."
1:19 "Write therefore what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."

Clearly the intention of the book is encouragement - real encouragement.
To those first century Christians and to us he wrote:
2:7 "...To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God."
2:11 "...He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death."
3:21 "To him who overcomes I will give the right to sit with me on my throne..."

In seven different ways to the seven churches he has repeated, "Yes, it is worth it. If you persevere, if you keep on believing, if you remain faithful you will discover that the end more than makes up for the difficulties on the journey.

There is a day coming when it will be obvious that it was worth it all.

Paul said it this way in Romans 8:18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

What I have just said, many through the years have cynically described as "Pie in the sky bye and bye!"

Their claim is that Christianity just holds out this unreal picture of the future that dupes people into believing that something better is out ahead and they must keep the faith.

Is there something better ahead?

Do you believe in life after death?

Do you believe in heaven?

On what authority do you believe in such things?

Who says that there's a heaven?

Why should those Christians in Ephesus and Smyrna and Laodicea believe that if they overcome they will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God?

In this chapter John laments the hopelessness of an uncertain future and contrasts that with the certainty and authority of Jesus Christ.

The setting in chapter 5 is the same as in chapter 4.

John has been ushered into the future to see a picture of heaven.

He is seeing what will happen.

The first thing that grabs his attention is a throne as we saw in chapter 4.

There was someone sitting on the throne but what John described was a powerful display of light.

The combination of light and sound that emanated from the throne left no doubt that it was God who was seated there - and he was majestic.

Around the throne were 24 other thrones on which were seated 24 elders - representative of all the people of God from all the ages.

Closer to the throne were 4 living creatures representative of all creation.
And together they were praising God for his sovereignty - his authority over everything and all history.

John is reminded that this is the God they trust - The God who reigns supreme.

When we come to chapter 5 we have the same setting but someone new appears on the scene.

But to get to who that is and why he is presented in this way, let's start with the scene as John describes it.

5:1 "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."

What was written on the scroll?

When we come to chapter 6 we will see that the scroll contains information about the end of the age - it represents the end of history.

5:2-4 "And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.'"

The scroll, as we said, contains the end of the age.

The scroll is the last chapter of history.

The scroll is the culmination of life as we have known it for thousands of years and the ushering in of the new age - the fullness of the kingdom of God.

And at the beginning of chapter 5, the whole universe and everyone in it was summoned to listen up.

The question was posed - "Is there anyone who has the authority to bring life as we know it to an end? Is there anyone out there who has the power to stop history?"

Anyone who can change the way the human race is going?

And the answer? No one! No one could do anything about it!

And John realized that what did he do? He WEPT and WEPT!

WHY?

John is personally acquainted with suffering.

He is, as he writes this book, sitting in a prison on a rock in the Aegean Sea. He knows of the destruction and death being suffered by those he loves.

He has all his life believed that following Jesus and teaching others to follow Jesus would be worth it - but now what does he see?

He sees a scroll representing the future and sees that no one has the authority to bring a different future to pass.

Must life in the future be nothing more than what life has been in the past?

Is it simply life and death, life and death, in a never ending cycle.

John cries because all his life he has believed in the "blessed hope" - that a new world was coming - brought in by Jesus himself - but now it appears that won't happen.

Are we left to our own devices to make this world a better place because THIS is all there is?

"Men have repeatedly exerted themselves to work out their own salvation and the salvation of the world. Systems of thought, world-systems of philosophy, have been built up by human minds one after another to show the way to true peace and righteousness and to establish an imitation of the kingdom of bliss. But they have all met with utter failure and disaster."

(In Hoeksema)

How many have tried and failed?

Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Caesar, Charlamagne, Napoleon, Washington/Jefferson, Lenin/Stalin, Mao Tse Tung.

Maybe we need a league of nations, a United Nations?

Maybe we need to restructure the elements of culture - drive out prejudice, redistribute the wealth, remove restraint.

Doesn't history repeatedly reveal the utter failure of people to bring in the paradise they crave?

John cries at the very thought that this life is all there is.

The world would keep on revolving, time would continue, injustice and suffering would continue forever if God didn't intervene and put a stop to the whole thing.

That the world would never end is a frightening prospect.

That justice would never prevail.

That we would forever be subject to our own inventions and capacities is devastating.

6000 or more years of human history and we are still just as capable of murdering, stealing, raping, hating each other in this century as in any century in the past.

Will this world never come to an end?

Are we condemned to live in this sunrise/sunset for eternity?

That would make any thoughtful person weep!!

Listen to the hopelessness of this age expressed by a N.Y. taxi driver: - listen to the despair that knows no future:

Jose Martinez, New York taxi driver wrote: "We're here to die, just live and die. I live driving a cab. I do some fishing, take my girl out, pay taxes, do a little reading and then drop dead. You've got to be strong about it. Life is a big fake. Nobody cares. You're rich or you're poor. You're here, you're gone. You're like the wind. After you're gone, other people come. It's too late to make it better. Everybody's fed up, can't believe nothing no more... People only care about one thing and that's money. We're gonna destroy ourselves, nothing we can do about it. The only cure for the world's illness is nuclear war - wipe everything out and start over... Life is nothing." Zacharias

Comment [GLN1]:

That's life without a future.
That's life if God doesn't intervene.
That's history repeating itself endlessly
That's what we get if we reject God.

The emptiness of our age, an age which rejects God's picture of the future, is depicted in a satirical poem by Steve Turner an English Journalist

"We believe in MarxFreudandDarwin.
We believe everything is OK
as long as you don't hurt anyone,
to the best of your definition of hurt,
and to the best of your knowledge.

We believe in sex before, during and after marriage.
We believe in the therapy of sin.
We believe adultery is fun.
We believe sodomy's OK.
We believe that taboos are taboo.

We believe everything's getting better
despite evidence to the contrary.
The evidence is investigated
and you can prove anything with evidence.

We believe there's something to horoscopes,
UFOs and bent spoons;
Jesus was a good man just like Buddha, Mohammed, and ourselves.
He was a good moral teacher although we think
His good morals were bad.

We believe that all religions are basically the same -
at least the one that we read was.
They all believe in love and goodness.
They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God and salvation.

We believe that after death comes nothing
Because when you ask the dead what happens
They say nothing.
If death is not the end, if the dead have lied,
then it's compulsory heaven for all.
Excepting perhaps Hitler, Stalin, and Genghis Khan.

We believe in Masters and Johnson.
What's selected is average.
What's average is normal.
And what's normal is good.

We believe that man is essentially good.
It's only his behavior that lets him down.
This is the fault of society.
Society is the fault of conditions .
Conditions are the fault of society.

We believe that each man must find the truth that is right for him.
Reality will adapt accordingly.
The Universe will readjust.
History will alter.
We believe that there is no absolute truth excepting the truth
that there is no absolute truth."

This is the postscript to such a world view:

"If chance be the father of all flesh,
disaster is his rainbow in the sky,
and when you hear:
State of Emergency!
Sniper kills ten!
Troops on the rampage!
Whites go looting!
Bomb blasts school!
It is but the sound of man worshipping his maker." (In Zacharias)

Why wouldn't John cry.
If this is all there is then everyone should cry.

5:5 "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 worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.'"

Wait a minute John, - stop crying! Don't despair, thinking all is lost and all is hopeless. There IS ONE who is worthy to reveal and usher in the end.
There is One who can set history right - who can bring justice.

Who is it?
The "Lion of the tribe of Judah"

Who is that?
The "Lion" metaphor appears again and again in Scripture as symbolizing power and ability to accomplish its will.

In Genesis 49:9-10 It was used of one of Jacob's children - Judah, 1500 years before Christ came to earth.

"You are a lion's cub O Judah...Like a lion he crouches...The scepter (the kingdom) will not depart from Judah...until HE comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."

Judah would become the royal family - from this family would come the king - and he did.

And though the kings of Israel came from the family of Judah, they eventually became so corrupt that "This is what the sovereign Lord says, '...remove the crown... It will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs.'" Ezekial 21:26-27

And to whom does that crown rightfully belong?

Matthew 1 makes much out of the fact that Jesus, through Mary, was descended from the tribe (family) of Judah.

Matthew 2:6 quoting from Micah (5:2) says that Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah...out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."

This Lion of Judah, this Jesus of this scene in heaven in the future is the Jesus of history who was born of the virgin Mary, who is the Messiah predicted 500 and 1800 years earlier.

This is no "Johnny come lately" - this is the Messiah.

The one with authority to open the scroll - to usher in the end of the age is also called the "Root of David".

If you have ever cut down a tree or a bush and left the stump in the ground you have probably had the experience of seeing that the next spring - a new slender shoot has grown up out of the left-over stump-root. -

that is the imagery here - David, and his father Jesse, may have died but out of their family has come another leader - Jesus.

Isaiah 11:1-10 predicted it 200 years after Jesse and David: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit...In that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him and his place of rest will be glorious..."

David had been promised by God that his throne would always be ruled by a descendant of his - Jesus is that descendant.

Matthew (1:1) begins his gospel with the words "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of David."

Luke records (1:31ff) the angel's words to Mary "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus.. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign...forever; his kingdom will never end."

The promised Messiah is the only One worthy and capable to take the scroll and open it - he is the only one who can usher in the end of this age and the beginning of the new one.

5:6 "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth."

This is a pivotal point in John's description of what he sees.

John is told by the elder to look at the Lion but when he looks what does he see?
A Lamb!

Why the switch?

That a lion would have power is obvious but how that power is exercised is what is now emphasized.

How Jesus "triumphs" is now indicated - He has triumphed as a Lamb.

Shear "lion" power alone would not accomplish the task that needed doing.

What was needed was a kind of power that could only be accomplished by a sacrificial lamb.

If there was ever going to be any future for us beyond destruction - something had to be done about sin.

Why is it that for 6000 years of recorded history people have not been able to bring in the paradise on earth that they have so eagerly sought?

BECAUSE the root of our problem is not superficial but systemic -
the basis of trouble from the beginning has and continues to be the sin
and corruption of human nature.

Years ago, the Times of London asked in an article, "What's wrong with the world?"

One famous man replied in this succinct and very accurate note: "I am. Yours truly G.K. Chesterton."

All the effort of every person in the world could not overcome the sin that infects every one of us.

The Kingdom of God could never be ushered in, in its fullness, until the problem of sin was dealt with. And so the Lamb!

John 1:29 John the Baptist says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Just as Isaiah had predicted 500 years earlier: Isa 53:7 "He was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter..."

It was a lamb that was sacrificed and whose blood was put on the door posts of the Israelite homes to prevent the killing of their firstborn when the angel of death swept through Egypt just before the Israelites were released from Egyptian captivity.

And it was a lamb that was sacrificed in the Temple to atone for the sins of the people.

And so it is a "Lamb" that is used to depict the authority necessary to bring about the end.

And Jesus is that Lamb who dealt with the problem of sin.

There was only one way the kingdom of God was ever going to be established and that way was the way of a sacrificial death.

If one was found who was able to bear the wrath of God, able to pay the penalty for sin, able to suffer and die not for his own sin but the sins of others, who could satisfy the unchangeable righteousness of God - only that One would be worthy to take the scroll - to bring about the end.

5:7-9 "He came 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... And they sang a new song. You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth."

At the center of all history is this event (the death/resurrection) of Jesus Christ.

There is no hope for a sinful people apart from this event.
The cross is crucial.
And that is why the Lamb is praised.

I Peter 1:18-19 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

And when the Lion/Lamb who makes the coming Kingdom possible is revealed what do those present do? They worship.

They recognize what every Christian through the ages has recognized -

We have a future - life as we know it is not endless.
History will have a conclusion.
Justice will be done. Not sin and death, but God will reign supreme.

Death is not the end.
And our future has been secured by the Lamb of God.
He is worthy.
Worthy not only to bring in the fullness of the Kingdom of God but worthy of our endless praise.

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise."

So when John wrote this chapter to those Christians in Ephesus and Sardis what did he expect them to do?

He expected them to see that Jesus is truly triumphant - that Jesus, the Lamb, has secured the future for those who are His.

And they too would worship Him - confident of his grace and power.