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**“The Lion of Judah” Revelation 5:1-7**

The book of Revelation was written by the apostle John. It is not like his gospel nor the 3 letters of his in the NT. Rather it falls into the category of books like that of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. In these works we see the speakers given supernatural revelation through visions. It is no different in John’s revelation. For John these glorious visions come to him while he is in the Spirit “on the Lord’s Day”, i.e. the day of resurrection, the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week.

We see this very clearly in chapter 1:9 *“I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day...”* So John is caught up in the power of the Spirit that he might experience an ecstatic revelation of the Divine will, and write it down for the benefit of the church. He is told to write down what he sees in the visions that were to come. V.10-11 *“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, “write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches....”*

This then is what makes up the content of Revelation, John writing down what God shows him in Christ through His Spirit on the Lord’s Day. We know these visions are from God in Christ because John tells us at the beginning in ch.1:1 *“The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants the things that must soon take place”*

We then see of course that John’s revelation begins with a glorious vision of Christ, the Son of Man, standing in the midst of the churches and Christ reassures John saying, *“Do not fear I am the first and the last, the living one. I died and behold I am alive forevermore. I have the keys of Death and Hades”* (ch.1:17-18).

John as we saw already, was given these visions while in exile on an island called Patmos. He was exiled on account of his allegiance to the Word of God and his witness to Christ. The visions were given and the book was written and sent to the churches in order to encourage them in their faith. We see in the letters to the churches in chapter 2-3 that some in the church were suffering persecution, and would suffer more in the days to come, some in the church were materially poor, some in the church tolerated false teaching and sin, and then there were some in the church who had acquired material wealth and therefore thought that they did not need anything else. Christ shows this last group that they were actually spiritually destitute.

All of the churches at this time though were living under the authority of the powerful arm of the Roman Empire. Emperor worship was in the air, some were persecuted for their faith. Overall it seems to have been a difficult time for these churches filled with uncertainty. We know very well that this was the existence that the apostle John was living when he received this revelation.

He was in exile, as legal punishment, on an island, separated from the physical presence of other believers. If there was anyone living in a state of uncertainty, not knowing what might happen from 1 day to the next, it was John. And we know that others in the churches shared this kind of suffering because of the content of the letters to the churches, and also because he says of himself, *“I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus...”*

And so John is given this revelation to not only bring encouragement to him but to encourage a suffering church. Beloved if you are in Jesus and therefore part of His Kingdom, you will suffer. The issue is not if and when we will suffer but who we turn to in our suffering. This is what the passage gives us. The main point of this passage is this: The Lord Jesus Christ rules and governs all of history and has conquered death and sin for the church to the praise of His glory.

The vision in chapter 5 is to be taken together with the vision given in chapter 4. There John gives a typical introduction seen when prophets in Scripture receive supernatural revelation through vision. *“After this I looked and behold...” ch.4:1*

We see similar language in Daniel 7: *“in the first year of Belshazzar King of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and vision of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. Daniel declared, “I saw in my vision by night, and behold....”*

What here does John see? He sees a door open in Heaven. And he was again caught up in the Spirit and he sees a vision of the glory of God, who is pictured to John as seated on a throne and around the throne are living creatures with eyes all around and with 6 wings worshiping the One on the throne unceasingly crying out day and night, *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God almighty who was and is and is to come”*

And there are 24 elders with crowns on their heads who cast their crowns down before the same throne and worship God on His throne. And they worship Him as the Creator God, *“worthy are you, our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by all things they existed and were created”* God is the Creator and Redeemer and He has accomplished redemption through His Son.

These visions in ch. 4 and 5 are important here because the rest of what John sees beginning in chapter 6 have to do with events and judgments that take place on earth. In the cycles of judgment that follow the judgments increasingly become more intense and they ultimately cover the entire cosmos, and culminate in the salvation of God’s people. But for the churches hearing these things it was important that they know these events on earth issued forth from the decree *in Heaven*.

In fact the events are brought about by God through the instrumentality of the prayers of the saints, offered up through Christ to God, *“and when He [Christ the lamb] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints”*

As we consider the specific part of the vision given in our passage we have to understand that this type of literature in the Bible is to be understood somewhat differently than other types we come across. The visions that come to Ezekiel, Daniel and here in John are described in detail by the prophet or apostle but they are to be understood figuratively. The visions give us a kind of living picture of the nature of all reality in Heaven and on earth.

The pictures John sees are real visions but they are given to *represent* a deeper reality. The figures and forms in the vision illustrate, through pictures, the characteristics of the *true* thing to which they point. This method of interpretation is the Bible’s own method as it pertains to ecstatic visions like this.

For example at the very beginning of the book John sees a vision of the Son of Man holding 7 stars in his hand and He was standing in the midst of 7 lampstands and in v.20 we are told by Christ Himself *“as far as the mystery of the 7 lampstands, the 7 stars are the angels of the 7 churches and the 7 lampstands are the 7 churches”*.

The vision, like other visions, in chapter 5 is filled with descriptions of extraordinary sights and sounds, things that appeal to the human senses, that the church might be comforted wherever they are and in whatever circumstance they are in. For John this would have brought great comfort to him, separated as he was from any physical contact with other believers that we know of.

And so John sees God seated on a throne in Heaven. This does not mean that God has a body. He is Spirit. The heavens and highest heavens cannot contain Him. God sitting on a throne here represents His absolute sovereignty over all of creation and all of human history. Earthly kings sit on their thrones on earth and rule over their subjects from that earthly throne. God is the King who reigns from His throne *in Heaven*.

He then sees that in the right hand of the One on the throne was a scroll written within and on back sealed with seven seals. The scroll here represents the decree of God. The writing on the scroll, which is filled as much as possible apparently, on the front and the back, represents the details of the plan of God concerning all of human history.

This is seen clearly in that when the scroll is opened in chapter 6, judgments come upon the earth and its inhabitants. On the scroll is written the secret plan of God that determines the destinies of all men and all kingdoms, all angels and Satan himself. The scroll has within it as well the destiny of Death and Hades.

But it is sealed with 7 seals. The seals signify the authenticity and the authority of the One who wrote and sealed the scroll. The seals perhaps also signify the secrecy of the contents. At the end of Daniel in chapter 12 we see that he is told “to shut up the words and *seal the book* until the time of the end”

The number 7 is a number in Scripture that represents completeness or perfection. The *7 seals* emphasize then the supreme authority held by the One in whose Name the scroll is sealed. Only the One who is equal in authority with the One on who sealed it, the King on His throne, is worthy to break the seals.

Next John sees a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “*who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?*” The angel is described as mighty. Only the a strong supernatural being such as this, proclaiming from the throne room in Heaven, could conjure up a voice that is heard throughout all of Heaven and earth and under the earth even.

The question refers not simply to the power of the One who can break the seals but to His worthiness, His character. What kind of moral worth must this One have? Think about what the living beings and the 24 elders are saying about the worth of the One on the throne. They say He is “holy, holy, holy” and that He is eternal in the Heavens, living forever and ever. They are saying He is worthy to receive worship from all creation which He Himself created by His will.

This One whom the Angel’s voice seeks out, he must exceed all angels and the 24 crowned elders in glory and honor. He must be thrice “Holy” and worthy to receive worship from all created things. Only one such as this can approach the very throne of God and reveal the secret plan of God.

Without much surprise we see that the mighty Angel’s voice goes unanswered, v.3 “*and no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll nor to look into it*”

The LORD said to His people in the time of the OT through the prophet Isaiah “*I am the LORD, that is my Name; my glory I give to no other*” All men fall short of His glory. We are all sinners under the judgment of God. There is only silence as the voice goes out to all of creation. The silence is broken as John understands the mighty voice will go unanswered. John weeps loudly because of this.

If the scroll remains unopened then the prayers of the saints for vindication and salvation go unanswered, Satan and Hell, the wicked kingdoms of this world, their judgment does not come. The tribulation and the patient endurance through death and disease, their purposes are sought in vain. Uncertainty is crowned and death still reigns.

For John in exile on an island for His faith, with the Roman Empire's shadow stretching out over all the world and the churches suffering and still battling sin, you can understand why John weeps *loudly*.

If there is anything constant about this current situation the world is in, it is that there is much uncertainty. We have questions about our employment and our health and the health of our loved ones. These are the kinds of questions we might be asking. It is all uncertain.

John longs for the One who is able to open the scroll and provide certainty, fulfill God's promises, so he weeps.

In the vision John hears the sound of the voice of the mighty angel and then silence. The next sound that is heard is the sound of his own weeping. His own weeping breaks the silence but then the sound of another voice interrupts the flowing of his tears.

v.5 "And one of the elders said to me, *"weep no more; behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals"*

The reference to the Lion of the tribe of Judah is taken from Genesis 49. There Jacob, before his death, gathers his 12 sons and blesses them and in turn prophesies of Judah, his 4<sup>th</sup> son, that a royal figure would be born to his line, and the honor of royalty to this line would remain: *"Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey my son you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the people's"* Gen. 49:9-10

The man referred to here is also called by the elder, the root of David, that is, he is a descendant of the exalted Davidic line in Israel. In chapter 22 Jesus says to John, *"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David"*

David, as was well known in Israel, had killed Goliath and killed his 10,000's. At one point in time God, through David, had firmly established the kingdom of Israel in glory. He is *the* one, at the height of Israel's worldly power, about whom Jacob prophesied in Genesis who had *"eyes darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk"* (Gen. 49:12). Surely the descendant of a king such as David has the power and honor to execute the plan of God, to open the scroll and to break its seals.

But as John turns to see the likeness of this Davidic king, who has conquered, he does not see a crown and a sword but a lamb! It is standing and not just a meek standing lamb but one as that had been slain.

This slain lamb in the vision is a clear reference to the slaughter of the Passover Lamb. The shed blood of the lamb smeared on the doorposts of the houses of Israel protected the Israelites from the wrath of God and gave them victory over Pharaoh and their Egyptian slavemasters. *"and you shall keep it until the 14<sup>th</sup> day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill (or slaughter) their lambs at twilight"* Exo. 12:6

The servant of Isaiah 53 is led like a lamb to the slaughter. By the blood of Christ, the true Passover lamb who was slain, our sins are forgiven, in Christ we can now approach God in Heaven. The cries of the souls of the saints slain for the Word of God, they go directly to God ch.6:10 *"sovereign Lord holy and true how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*

But by His blood Christ the Lamb has also “conquered”. At the cross Christ conquered death and hades and Satan. Friends this is the paradoxical wisdom of the gospel, the Lion who conquers, the One who has the authority to execute the judgment of God, has this authority and honor because He was obedient to the point of death. He is exalted to the right hand of God in Heaven, and breaks the seals to reveal God’s plan, because He first was *slain*, led like a lamb to the slaughter.

He died as a criminal on a Roman cross. And the fact that the Redeemed and the angels are pictured as singing praises to Him in this way: “*worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing*” shows that Christ’s death has permanent efficacy and power for the believer.

The lamb that John sees as though slain is not lifeless for the lamb is *standing* and He goes to take the scroll from the One on the throne. Christ is alive, as He declared at the beginning of the revelation “Behold I died, but I am alive forevermore” The wisdom of the gospel revealed in this vision to John, it causes the eruption of 5 songs to the Lamb in this chapter. He alone is thrice Holy, He alone is worthy of praise, He alone shares in the glory of the Father, Christ alone is the One who can answer the angel’s voice.

At the cross He conquers. At the cross in Christ we were crucified to the world. Friends the wisdom of the cross teaches us how we conquer in times like this. The saints in Revelation are depicted as those who conquer by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11). They follow the lamb wherever He goes (ch.14:4). Victory friends comes by way of faithful obedience and perseverance to the end.

The seven eyes of the Lamb refer to Christ’s comprehensive knowledge of all things, His omniscience, and the seven horns refer to Christ’s power, like the horns of a beast display its power (Dt. 33:17). He is the all knowing and all powerful Resurrected Lamb, who applies the power of His death and resurrection to you at all times from Heaven. As He said to the churches in John’s day so He says to you “*I know your tribulation and patient endurance*”

And so friends let us find comfort in this, that Christ has been given all authority in Heaven and on earth for He was slain. All judgment has been given to the Son. This Lamb whom we worship is the One who breaks the seals on the plan of God for all human history and determines the destinies for all men and angels. The descendant of David has conquered death, for He is both David’s son and David’s Lord. Let us worship Him and remain faithful to Him to the end.