

"From Weeping to Worship"

I read a blog recently that said as of December 2016 over 250 end-of-the-world movies have been produced - more than a hundred since the year 2000. One of the biggest movies from last summer, *Mad Max Fury Road* falls into this category. It's interesting how many people with all the challenges with their relationships and careers and health and money in the real world right now are still intrigued by these end of the world scenarios. Why is that? In the blog I was reading the author raised the question: *"Could it be that deep down we know that our history has its appointed conclusion, that the end of our story has already been written?"* He suggested that these movies are tapping into a deep inner curiosity about the most significant questions of human life: *who are we as human being really? Where are we headed? How does that destiny shape the way we live today?*

You may remember from our first sermons on Revelation that the Greek title for Revelation is *apokalypsis*. That word means an "unveiling". What we all need to see in the "unveiling" that actually takes place in Revelation is that while part of that has to do with the end of the world that's not all of it. Revelation is also about the unveiling of the ultimate true spiritual reality now: the way things really are beyond all our illusions, delusions and denials now. Revelation shows us that our vision is not just a little less than complete but dangerously narrow, fuzzy, clouded and small. If we take to heart the vision of reality Revelation gives us it will give us hope and strength for right now as well as for whatever is coming. This hope springs up out of the infinite depths of the love of God and from his grace. There *will be* an end to the world as we know it. There will be an end to *this* world of injustice, and suffering, and emptiness and death. There will be a new heavens and a new earth. That's the main point of **Revelation 5**. *God's good purposes will triumph because of the sacrifice of Jesus. That's why He is so worthy of all our worship.*

I. GOD'S PURPOSES WILL TRIUMPH.

Revelation 4 shows us God, spectacularly mysteriously great and good and worthy of all worship. But what happens in **chapter 5**? John sees, in the right hand of God, *a scroll written within and on the back and sealed with seven seals*. *What does it mean? It means...*

A. God has a purpose for this world.

1. The scroll represents everything the rest of the book of Revelation is going to unfold. The fact that it is written on the inside and the outside is a symbolic way of saying this is the fullness of all that God wants and plans to do. It includes the judgments but it ends with every tear wiped away. This plan of God cannot be revealed, unrolled, accomplished, unless there is someone worthy to break the seals. Now look at the drama in the vision. In **verse 2** He sees an angel - not just any angel but a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, *“Who is worthy to open the scroll and break the seals?”* And no one in all of creation is worthy. Twice it says: “no one”. And he begins to *weep loudly*. This is not just a tear that forms on the corner of his eye.

I remembered the night my mother died. She was the same age I am now. My Father, my sister, her sister - my aunt, and me, filling the house with weeping - such a feeling of loss and grief. Have you ever wept like that? John was weeping like that. John was sobbing because He knows, without being told how important this is. This is the fullness of God's plan, God's purpose, God's salvation for human kind and planet earth. Without the fulfillment of God's plan, represented by this scroll, all the struggles and sorrows and suffering will be worse than meaningless, earth will be a wasteland and all of humanity lost eternally and no one and nothing will be redeemed.

We could all weep at over that but we don't have to because...

B. God's purposes will be fulfilled.

Look at **verse 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 comes from the first book in the Bible: Genesis. In Genesis 49, when Israel blessed his sons he pictured Judah as a lion and he prophesied that a perpetual royal dynasty of kings would come from his descendents. Later when God chose David from the tribe of Judah to be king, the prophesy was moved forward. When the Jews went into captivity in Babylon David's dynasty looked like a tree that had been cut down leaving only the root and stump. But then Isaiah prophesied that a shoot would come from that seemingly dead stump and a fruitful branch would grow from that seemingly dead root. (Isaiah 11:1,10) This is why in the Bible a big point is made that Jesus is from the tribe of Judah and the family of David. His life was the fulfillment of prophesies. This entire unfolding story has taken place in the context of spiritual warfare so it doesn't just say he can open the scroll. It says; *“he has conquered, so that*

he can open the scroll with its seven seals.” Let that sink in. It's easy to focus on the strange scroll, the mighty angel and the twenty-four elders. The interesting thing is scholars don't all agree on all the details but pretty much everyone sees the main point here: The scroll, which represents the fulfillment of God's purposes, gets opened because of the victory of Jesus. There is a plan that God has for the world. An enemy opposed it. A battle was fought. Jesus won.

But there is a surprise in this vision that is meant to make an impression. It's not just that God's purposes will triumph but also that

II. GOD'S PURPOSES TRIUMPH THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF THE LAMB.

In **verse 5** John *hears the lion* has conquered and can open the scroll. In **verse 6** he *sees a lamb*.

A. Jesus is the Lamb who was slain.

The “lamb” is *the* title used to describe and speak of Jesus more than any other name or title in Revelation. When the Bible speaks of Jesus as the lamb it is emphasizing the sacrifice of Jesus.

1. Jesus as the lamb is powerful. He is not just powerful as the lion but as the lamb. Look at *this* lamb in **verse 6**: it has been slain and yet it is standing. It has seven horns and seven eyes. Horns represent power and eyes knowledge. In Revelation seven is the perfect number so this lamb, is all knowing and all-powerful and it has been slain and yet it is very much alive. Jesus is the lion and the lamb. '

2. Jesus as the lamb has ransomed people from every tribe and language and people and nations. **Verses 9-10** say Jesus is not just saving a people who will avoid judgment by his grace but a people, from every tribe and nation who will be kings on the earth. A people who will serve as priests, and who will reign, as royalty.

B. God's purposes triumph through Jesus' sacrifice.

What this means for us is twofold...

1. God's victory is certain. It isn't dependent on God winning some future battle with evil. The lion, who is the lamb, who sees all things and has all power and to whom we pray - that's the symbolism of the bowls of incense - already holds the scroll of destiny in his hands. It's going to all be unfolding according to God's plan because of Jesus and

the cross! It's finished in more ways than one. *Jesus as the lamb not only saves people he saves everything.* His death is the reason God's purposes will be fulfilled creation renewed and good triumph.

I know someone who had a nightmare so horrible he would never even reveal the awful details but told that in his dream his entire family was slaughtered. It seemed so real in the dream but when he woke up his family was fine. He said, *"When I woke up after the dream, the nightmare in which I thought I had lost them, I got them back again. I couldn't even look at them without crying—for sheer joy."* He said, *"Having gotten them back after losing them, made the experience of having them infinitely greater."* **Revelation 5** gives people who may sometimes find that life is like a bad dream - even a nightmare - a vision of what it will be like to wake up from out of this present world and to clearly see the total victory of Jesus and the purposes of God fully fulfilled. If your life doesn't have any sorrow in it now be thankful for that but know the world is under a very real curse and there is a lot of sin and suffering still. If and when you see that side of life or when you go through it you need to know that God's purposes are going to be fulfilled. Sure it doesn't always look or feel like that in the present. I didn't in the days when the descendents of David looked like the dead stump of a once great tree. It will not look good in the time of the final traumas of human history. But Jesus has already won the decisive battle and God's purposes will triumph. If that were not the case we should all be weeping. Since that is the case we can rejoice and worship with the angels!

Did you know that more than once in his life Jesus spoke the same words the elder said to John? He came to a widow weeping over a lost son and to a father weeping over a lost daughter and he said, *"Do not weep"* (Luke 7:13 & 8:52). How could he say that? He said that because in both cases he was going to bring back what had been lost. In a sense that's exactly what Revelation 5 promises - shows us - in relation to all of our sorrows. In the end, we will see, that in every little thing God's good purposes will be fulfilled. We can believe that now and in every place where we feel like weeping we can choose to worship and that worship will give you strength.

That's the first thing, here's the second...

2. As followers of the lamb who conquered by suffering we also have to be ready to conquer by our willingness to suffer like Jesus. We have to have in our hearts the strength and nobility and

confidence of a lion and yet be willing to act and to sacrifice like lambs. In **Matthew 10:16** Jesus said, *“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”* The word *“innocent”* has a twofold meaning, innocent and harmless.

The apostle Peter said to put up with injustice and suffering because you are following Jesus is a gracious, beautiful thing in the eyes of God. In **1 Peter 2:21-23** he says. *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* In Revelation we are going to see visions of the end of history when the followers of Jesus will conquer evil not by pitting strength against strength but by following Jesus and being willing to suffer and die for him. But that way of life is not just for an apocalyptic future. It's for right now and it's sorely needed in the church, the family and the community. We worship Jesus authentically when we don't just sing about his excellencies but actually shape our lives according to his example. Follow the Lamb who is the Lion and worship him!

III. GOD'S PURPOSES WILL TRIUMPH BECAUSE OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE LAMB, THEREFORE HE IS WORTHY OF ALL WORSHIP.

Several scholars point out that what we have in **Revelation 5** is one of the greatest scenes of universal adoration for Christ and for God found anywhere in any form. Beginning in **verse 11** the adoration and worship of the Lamb and of God moves out in ever widening circles. **Verses 11-12:** *Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”* **Verses 13-14** say, *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”* **14** *And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.* Every creature, in every part of the universe to it's deepest depths and it's farthest corners worship the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb. To the degree that you see believe what this is saying you will worship also.

That's the point. It's not just telling us that angels and others worship him but that he is worthy and therefore we should worship also. There is nothing and no one more worthy of your love or worship.

Jennifer Lopez, the popular singer and actress has written a memoir titled *True Love*. I haven't read it - can't imagine I will - but I read something from it. I hope the fact that it is J. Lo doesn't make the illustration seem cheezy to you. In her memoir she opens up about her personal life. She's been married three times but is single now. The first two lasted less than a year. To her credit she's honest about the naive view of love she embraced for most of her adult life. She said that each of her marriages had one thing in common. *"They all had a passionate intensity that I mistook every time, for my happily ever after. I was lucky—or unlucky—enough to be with men who did some crazy things, and I mean crazy things. Like releasing hundreds of doves outside my window, buying me a Bentley or two, giving me rare diamonds, throwing me giant parties, or sending me private jets to sweep me off somewhere ... And I loved it. It was intoxicating when it was happening. When a man does something like that, it's easy to think, Wow, look how much he loves me! ... How can you turn your back on a love so big, so amazing, so real? The problem is, it wasn't real love; it was passion. I just didn't know the difference yet.* (Adapted from R. J. Moeller, "Jennifer Lopez on Life, Love, and Bad Reasons to Get Married," Acculturated blog 12-19-14) These words especially stood out at me: *How can you turn your back on a love so big, so amazing, so real?* Yet, as she said, *the problem is, it wasn't real love; it was passion.* Here's a woman who has made millions of dollars and has millions of fans - but she talks about being blown away by what she thought was a crazy love but in the end proved to be so much less - without substance.

Now compare that to what **Revelation 5** says you can have in Christ. Here is a love that has great passion but so much more. If you want to see what a crazy and intoxicating love looks like look here. In Revelation 5 all of creation worships the lamb who was slain - who ransomed people by his blood. He didn't just spend money on you. He shed his blood for you. You can't sing or dance or look good enough to attract or impress him or to be some trophy for him. He just loves you because he loves you and wants to ransom and redeem you from the bondage of sin and threat of judgment. God's love is so great that in your unwashed, broken, wretched, foolish pride, he loved you. And talk about a love that does crazy things for you - this Lion, became a Lamb for you. This God who is holy, beautiful and glorious humbled himself and became one of us and was slaughtered and shed his

blood to pay for your sins and buy you back and save your soul... so that you can not only be with him but reign with him in his eternal kingdom. Where can you find a love more crazy, amazing, intoxicating and yet more real, more substantive, lasting and transforming than this? You can't! There isn't any.

How do you get this love? **Revelation 22:17** *The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.* **Revelation 3:20** *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.* You receive this love by repenting, opening the door, coming to Jesus and trusting him. You put your faith, not in yourself, but in him. What he has already done to impress you with his love by dying for you and rising again, is nothing compared to what he is going to show you and give you when he brings you home and shares his glory fully. Believe that and worship Him.

Conclusion

When you worship him because you see he is worthy that worship empowers you. So he deserves it and we need it. We have a huge mission to fulfill and many challenges. We are called to live and love like Jesus, to love each other - to be committed to the church and to serve the world and do good and share the gospel, to grow deeper in true spirituality, holiness and intimacy with God. All of that can only be empowered by hearts that worship because they have received God's grace and see that he is worthy of all worship.

When you worship Him remember this also: the Bible tells us the lamb of **Revelation 5** who is worthy of all worship already lives in us. **Ephesians 5** says be filled with the Spirit singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord. Let the worship begin now. I want to live my life this year and for the rest of my life waking up every day and saying: *"I believe in the triumph of the Lamb"*. He is worthy of honor and praise and every other gift of worship in word and deed all the time.

Amen.