

THE NOW

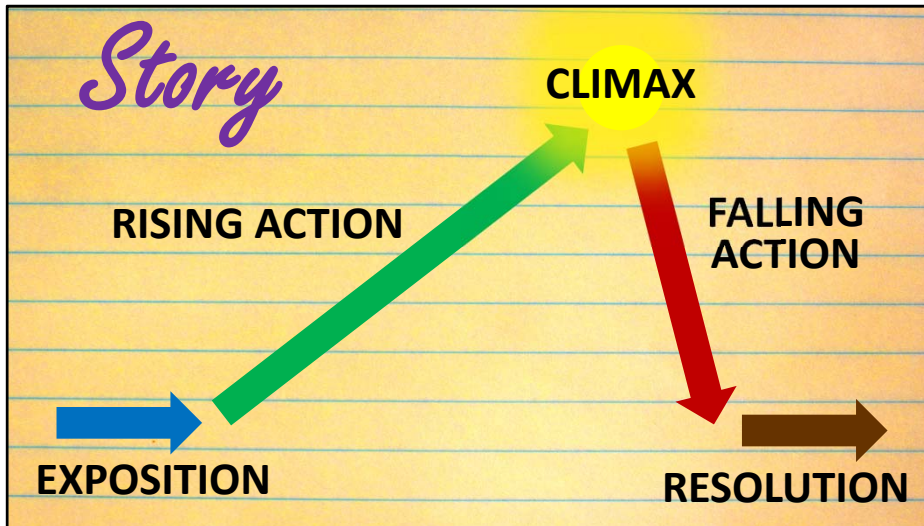
THE BOOK OF REVELATION:
*VISIONS OF THE THEN
THAT CHANGE OUR NOW*

(Intro Slide)



“Joe crept slowly, trying to stay within the narrow blind spot of the machine gunner within the fortified bunker. He’d already seen a number of his buddies shredded by the blistering, unrelenting hail of bullets. His heart was pounding so hard that thought he could hear it, even with the barrage of noise that all the weapons coughed out. The opening was just too little to throw in a hand grenade, so he would have to go around to the back of the cement fortress and clear it out. Sneaking a glimpse around the edge, it looked like the coast was clear, or at least, clear enough. Joe steadied himself, trying to find the courage to turn into the doorway. Who knew if a Nazi was waiting for him to do just that? A big breath later, the young private briefly prayed and then he made his move.”

TR: Let’s analyze this short story.



Most stories, especially short stories, often follow a similar outline.
-- Called the Story triangle or the story mountain . . . REVIEW SLIDE.
-- Wait . . . are you wanting to know what happened to Joe?
-- Are you wanting some sort of resolution to the story?

TR: I believe most of us . . .

**Don't you ache for
"resolution?"**

. . . ache for resolution.

-- I've seen it in when I tell illustration stories, taking my point but not finishing the "what happened." Folks will grab me in the hallway, asking, "What happened?"

-- You've seen it when a great TV story sucks you in but then you see the dreaded, "To be continued" flash on the screen.

-- Even third graders have heard the groaning of the class when the teacher ends the day's reading of a great story "right in the most exciting part."

-- We want to know what happens . . . how does OUR story end or resolve?

-- And it is especially true when our story so far seems to be ending as an end of the season "cliff hanger," doesn't it?

TR: Don't we all have some ache for at least the hope of

resolution?

**Don't you ache for
"resolution?"**

5:1-4

John certainly did!

READ SLIDE

- The beloved disciple, the one closest of all to our Lord Jesus, the apostle of love, had witnessed a lot since Jesus ascended into heaven.
- He'd seen the spreading of the gospel like a wildfire. He witnessed the Jew-Gentile tension tear at the fabric of the church.
- He'd seen false teachers sneak in and try to pervert the truth.
- He'd experienced the wrath of the powerful, even as one sent into exile on the island of Patmos.
- He had cringed watching believers struggle with the demands of the Caesar to be worshipped . . . how do you do business to provide for your family in a world bowing to idols of one kind or another.

TR: Jump into the middle of our text, Revelation 4-5, looking at the

opening verses of chapter 5 . . .

Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ²And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "**Who is worthy** to open the scroll and break its seals?"

ESV

READ SLIDE

- We'll look back in a moment to chapter 4 and see the throne room of God described.
- But, for now, we see God holding the scroll, written on both sides. Rolled like paper towels but written on both sides.
- Sealed with seals, either on the end or the edge. Some think that the seals were placed to allow part of the scroll to be unfurled before another seal would need to be broken.
- The question of the moment . . . WHO IS WORTHY?
- Osborne: [worthy] = more of authority > virtue . . . "who is sufficient?"

TR: What a horrifying moment, as portrayed in verse 3 . . .

And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, **and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- John had received revelation already. It was NOT just about some time THEN, but dealt with real churches and Christians facing the challenges of NOW.

-- How was the story going to turn out? Who would win? What would happen?

-- John wept loudly because no one was worthy and therefore the scroll would remain sealed.

TR: John ached for resolution to the great story of history. Just like the saints in Isaiah's and Daniel's days needed to know what was going to happen THEN to help them through their NOW, so do we. But . . .

Where should we begin our quest for “resolution?”

... READ SLIDE

-- Even the story presented in Revelation fits the short story model ... the horror of finding no one worthy comes at near the climax of the account.

TR: John had been climbing the mountain because God had given him a vision of the Almighty's throne room. Look back to chapter 4.

**Where should we begin our
quest for “resolution?”**

4:1-11

God called John to His throne

Because that is where we should begin our quest for the resolution we ache for.

TR: Revelation 4:1

After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you **what must take place after this.**"

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Understanding the book of Revelation is challenging. It seems to be the challenge is to decide what should be taken **MORE LITERALLY** and what should be understood as **MORE SYMBOLIC**.
- The **RECAPITULATION** of aspects of the revelation, that spiral back to various themes, points to a more symbolic, spiritualized understanding.
- But, the transitional statements like, "after this," or "what must take place after this" points us to an understanding that is less symbolic and more specifically literal about future events.
- I lean toward the literal, though not as far as some do who seem oblivious to the fact that we must understand the text **LITERALLY**, in terms of the literature that it is.

TR: Verse 2 continues . . .

At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- John describes it as having the “appearance of,” not actually made of these semi-lucent gems.

TR: Verse 4

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were **twenty-four elders**, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- These elders may be representatives of the OT saints and NT apostles, but many think they are angelic beings.
- As Psalm 89:7 speaks of the “council of His holy ones”

TR: Even closer to the throne of God we find what stretches our imagination. Verse 5.

From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- seven is a number of perfection and completeness . . . the seven-fold Spirit of God.

TR: Verse 6 continues . . .

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are **four living creatures**, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- eyes front and back = unceasing vigilance

-- ? if the whole of animate creation: noblest, strongest, wisest, swiftest

TR: Verse 8

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!"

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Seems to combine the vision of the cherubim in Ezekiel 1 and 10 with the seraphim of Isaiah 6
- Again, we read about the “full of eyes all around and within” – unceasing vigilance
- The worship centers around the holiness of God, bringing back to mind the vision of Isaiah in Isaiah 6.
- The holiness of God reflects His separation from the created order. He is NOT like us or anything else.
- The other foci is God’s eternity . . . He was, is and is to come.

TR: Verse 9

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: The worship is about falling down before the Lord, and declaring God's worthiness. Verse 10 continues . . .

They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

¹¹ "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Why is our Lord and God worthy?
- For He is the creator of all things.
- As we ache for the end of the story, we must remember the beginning . . . God created everything from nothing.
- Interestingly, these are very much like the titles the Domitian the Caesar took for himself.
- We may not have Caesars with god-complexes anymore, but we do have many who want to write the end of our stories even though they are not worthy.
- So the beginning of our quest for the resolution, to the storyline of creation and all of humanity, begins in the throne room of God.

**TR: But, John's loud weeping comes after this part of the vision.
His anguish sets up where our quest must be centered.**

On Whom must our quest for “resolution” be centered?

**It is not on what we must center our quest but on WHOM.
-- In the really hard moments of life, the question is less “why?”
than it is “who?” To whom do we go for hope?
-- God is worshipped because He is holy and the creator, but it is
Jesus, the Son of God Who is worthy.**

**TR: The rest of chapter 5 answers on whom we must center our
quest.**

**On Whom must our quest for
“resolution” be centered?**

5:5-14

**On the Lion-Lamb
Who was slain**

READ SLIDE

TR: Revelation 5:5

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."

ESV

READ SLIDE

- [lion of the tribe of Judah] = from Genesis 49:9, focused on military prowess
- [root of David] = the promise from 2 Samuel 7 of the line of David
- and he "has conquered."

TR: How did this One Who is the fulfillment of the prophecies of the OT conquer?

Revelation 5:6-7 pp. 1131

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw **a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain**, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- [a Lamb slain]

-- [seven horns, eyes, spirits] – horns and eyes = omnipotence and omniscience; spirits = seven-fold Spirit

TR: Verse 8

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- [incense] = prayers of the saints

TR: All together they sing . . .

Revelation 5:9-10 pp. 1132

And they sang a new song, saying,
"Worthy are you to take the scroll and
to open its seals, for you were slain,
and **by your blood you ransomed
people for God** from every tribe and
language and people and nation,
¹⁰and **you have made them a kingdom
and priests to our God, and they shall
reign on the earth.**"

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Why is the Lion-Lamb Who was slain worthy?
- Because His blood ransomed people for God . . . from all peoples.
- Because His work on the cross made these people a kingdom and priests to our God who will reign on the earth.
- This ties back to Exodus 19:6 and 1 Peter 2
- The central point of history, the hinge of history, is the cross of Christ.
- This reference to "reign on the earth" is one piece of evidence that an earthly kingdom is coming, and that we should take this book more literally rather than just symbolically.

TR: The vision zooms back and we see again the creatures and elders but now an uncountable number of angels . . .

Revelation 5:11-12 pp. 1132

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, ¹²saying 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!"

ESV

READ SLIDE

- All these words are connected by one article, telling us that it is one big connected idea . . .
- THE power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, blessing.

TR: The vision is not done zooming back, as verse 13 makes clear . . .

Revelation 5:13-14 pp. 1132

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!" ¹⁴And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Now it is **EVERY CREATURE . . .** not just the holy creatures, elders, and angels . . .
- **AND I don't think even the believers are the only humans there . . .** because every knee will bow, as Philippians 2 makes clear.
- Just like Isaiah needed a vision because the long reign of Uzziah the king was over and all were worried about the future,
- Just like Daniel and Ezekiel were given great visions to deal with their day, when the trauma of the exile brought all of the promises of God into doubt,
- **EX:** old illustration of watching a recorded game that you know the outcome of . . . no panic, no fear, just the wonder of how the turn around is going to happen.

TR: But what if we don't go to the throne room, what if we don't center our quest on the Lion-Lamb Who was slain? To put it another way . . .

**“What happens if we try to
'resolve' our own stories?”**

READ SLIDE

- Remember in the Gospels when Jesus teaches and many leave Him? “Do you want to leave me too?” The answer: “Where would we go?”**
- If we think of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, we get some idea if we try to write the end to our own stories . . .**
- . . . we may become weary and lose our first love,**
- we may become consumed by fear in the days of tribulation,**
- we may try to make our own religion, using a smorgasbord of thoughts from wherever,**
- we may start to tolerate false teachers because they encourage us to give in to our physical drives,**
- we may grow sleepy and imagine that this life will continue as it is forever, losing our sense of vigilance,**
- we may find our patient endurance harder and harder to hold**

fast to,

-- we may imagine that we are rich, prosperous, in need of nothing when we really are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

TR: Why can't we resolve our own stories? Because we are in the middle of them, and because we are not . . .

Revelation 5:9-10 pp. 1132

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and **by your blood you ransomed people for God** from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰and **you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.**"

ESV

. . . worthy to take the scroll.

-- Only the Lion-Lamb Who was slain has conquered.

-- Only He is sufficient because of what He has done by shedding His blood.

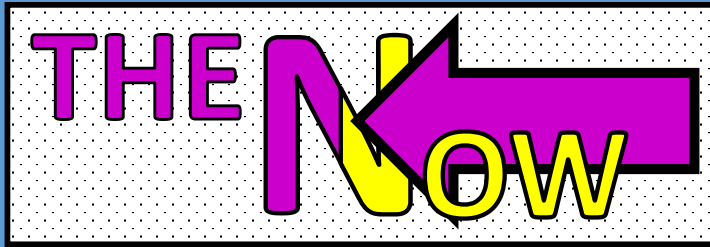
-- Praise God, even if we don't know all the details of our stories, we know that there is One worthy to open the scroll and bring history to a purposeful and meaningful conclusion.

-- We have the hope that "all things will work together for good."

-- Who are you trusting to write the end of your story?

-- Have you come to the place of trust where you'll bow the knee now and not just then, when you have no choice.

TR: As we come to the communion table . . .



THE BOOK OF REVELATION:

*VISIONS OF THE THEN
THAT CHANGE OUR NOW*

... we come looking back to the hinge of history, the cross of Jesus.
-- But, we also come looking to the future, because we proclaim His death until He comes again.
-- And, in the now, we examine ourselves, asking the Lord to purify us from sin so that we might be holy as He is holy.