
“The Throne, the Lamb and the Great Assembly”

Revelation 5:1-14

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Text:

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 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. ⁷ He came 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 the saints. ⁹ 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.

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 sang: "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, singing: "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.

Learning together question:

WSC # 26

Q. 26 How is Christ a King?

A. As a king, Christ brings us under His power, rules and defends us, and restrains and conquers all His and all our enemies.

As the time for Pastor Alberta's surgery was drawing near and he asked me to preach for him during missions month. I wanted to confirm with him: "You want me to preach on missions, right?" "Oh yeah," he said, "preach on missions." So I do this with a glad and sincere heart. I'm thankful for opportunity because the work of preaching actually forces me to meditate on God's word and think about it, and I find myself at the end of this week thinking very differently than I did only 7 days ago about the subject of missions. This message is still developing even as the time has come to deliver it to you now. I pray that it will have an effect on you.

Recently we've been watching events in Egypt. On January 25th, the people of Egypt gathered in Tahrir square for 18 days in Cairo demanding the dethronement of their ruler, President Mubarek. On Feb. 10, 16 days into this event, President Obama has these words to say:

"We are following today's events in Egypt very closely," said Mr. Obama. "We'll have more to say as this plays out. But what is absolutely clear is that we are witnessing history unfold...."

Yes, his statement was all true, "we are witnessing history unfold!" But isn't that what is always happening? I don't speak ill of President Obama, bless his heart! It is wise to say only what you know and no more. But the fact remains that even President Obama could only utter a truism—a statement that is saying only what is obvious an irrefutable. Something that could be said of any event at any time: "We are witnessing history unfold."

In Revelation 5 we are introduced to the one who doesn't merely witness history unfold. His is the one who unfolds history. Amen? In this passage we see Jesus high and lifted up as sovereign king. We see Jesus sitting on the throne of heaven. We see the one who deserves glory and honor and praise. We see the author of all creation, the one who wrote history, ruling and defending us. All time is in his hands, all kings are under his authority and all dominion belongs to him.

As we hit full swing of missions month here at Cornerstone, we are going to "fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorned its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2)

Here in Revelation 5 we see a glorious and image laden portrait of the incomparable Christ Jesus. Many people are reluctant to read Revelation because there are some many different views about end-times. There's historicist, preterist, futurist and idealist. There's pre-trib, post-trib, and mid-trib. Pre-millennial, Post-millennial, amillennial. One person once said, "I'm a pan-millennial, I believe it will all pan out in the end."

I believe that the key to reading Revelation is to keep our eye on this one theme—Jesus Christ's reign on the throne. Actually, Revelation is a very simple message. Jesus Christ has been exalted to the right hand of God the Father to execute judgment against sin, Satan and all of his enemies. (AMEN!) He does this so that the gospel will win, so that his peaceful reign will be established on the earth, and so that there is an end to history.

But you know there's really one key thing to keep in view when reading Revelation, that is Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, ruling and reigning now over all heaven and earth. Three themes come to bold display in this passage: Jesus rules the nations; Jesus rescues the nations; and Jesus receives the worship of the nations. Let's begin with that first theme.

The Throne

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 prevailing image as I said a moment ago is the Throne. This throne was introduced in the chapter four. R.J. Rushdoony, in his book *Thy Kingdom Come* says,

John, when heaven was opened to him by vision, saw, first of all, “a throne.” The central fact of heaven is not angelic bliss but the absolute authority of God over heaven and earth as symbolized in the throne.

He continues:

God on the Throne governs absolutely the whole of creation. This fact is underscored throughout Revelation. “He is represented as being on his throne in every chapter, save ch. 15, where he is in the temple, and chapter 2, 9 and 10 where there is no occasion for any mention of the Throne.” (Rushdoony, 129-130)

Now in the right hand of him who sits on the throne is a scroll. From study of Roman culture, it is very clear that this is a will. It was the common practice of Romans to seal their last will and testament with seven seals using seven witnesses. Once they died the seals could be broken with the witnesses present and the inheritance executed.

Hence, this scroll, (or will) is held out to the church in the right hand of God on the throne. It represents blessing to the church for the inheritance of the saints, held out to the creatures and elders. God’s blessing for us is to inherit the world and to rule over it. You remember Genesis 1 and 2 that God creates man to rule over the birds of the air, the fish of the sea and over every living thing. You also remember that man rebelled and forfeited his birthright by betrayal to God’s clear commands.

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.

There is a problem with the delivery of the last will and testament to pass on the inheritance to his own sons and daughters. He has no faithful children. No one is worthy to open the seals!

The inheritance is waiting, but without a reading of the will and execution of it, the inheritance will not pass. We’ve all heard the phrase, “signed, sealed and delivered.” This is only “signed and sealed, but not delivered.” What is lacking is not only the right to unveil the contents, but also the authority to execute the will.

John weeps because he knows the implication of this impasse. We too weep with him when we join in the longing for the redemption of the sons of men. In other words, what if we lived in a world where the kingdom of God was not going to advance? Where we do not inherit the blessing of adoption as sons and daughters? Where good was promised but cannot be delivered?

All of us who have a longing to see things made right on planet earth know this deep emotion inside. Do you ever just get angry about sin? Don’t you long for the world to be made right again? Don’t you want an end to corruption, poverty, death and sin? Doesn’t it break your heart that

thousand humans die every day from poverty, disease and famine? Doesn't it make you upset when evil prospers without consequence? When corruption prevails without judgment?

John weeps because he imagines a world in which there is no eschatology. A world in which there is no end to history. If we lived in a cyclical world with no end, no last and final result, no eschatology, we are men and women without hope. There is no point to the endless misery, grief and woe in this world.

John weeps because he wants to see God's plan unfold and the longing of that plan rises up in him and causes deep anguish. And so John weeps. And weeps.

How about you, do you weep over the things John weeps for? Have you opened your eyes to see the world around you? Do you know that there are 3.5 Billion people who know nothing of Christ? 40% of the worlds population are unreached by the gospel. Millions who have never hear the name, the sweet name of Jesus, the way, the truth and the life, the only way to God!

Many years ago a man by the name of Bob Pierce prayed: "Let my heart be broken with the things that break God's heart." That prayer led to brokenness, which led to prayer and also to action. He became the founder of World Vision—huge organization committed to meeting physical needs around the world.

This is lesson one of missions. The man or woman God uses as his ambassador in the world is the one the one who weeps. Join John the seer of the apocalypse, Join Jeremiah the weeping prophet.

Years ago a singer named Keith Green sang these words:

"Bless me Lord, Bless me Lord, you know that's all I ever hear."

No one weeps, no one cares, no one even sheds one tear.

Jesus is calling and you're the one. But like Jonah you run.

You close your eyes and pretend the job's done.

Don't close your eyes; don't pretend the job's done.

When I think about the magnitude of the millions of people who need to hear the gospel and the glory of Jesus Christ, I'm rocked to my core. Missions for me is becoming more than just a month. It's a way of life.

Why have we been blessed with so much in a time when so much needs exist? Why is there this disparity? How can we be so content with so much while the rest of the world has so little.

There is a time for weeping and a time for rejoicing. Look with me at verse 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 able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

God has a Son, to whom he is pleased to give the inheritance. There is one with authority to deliver the inheritance once for all purchased for all the saints. Jesus has redeemed us as his own and we who are adopted become co-heirs with Christ—inheritors of the kingdom of God. This is glorious news!

The ascension of Jesus is key to understanding Christianity. Jesus comes and receives the scroll from the Father. This fulfills Daniel 7:

Daniel 7:13-14 ¹³ "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

This also fulfills Jesus' own words in Matthew 26:

Matthew 26:64 ⁶⁴ "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Jesus is sovereign over the nations. We can declare the realities of Psalm 99 through Jesus.

Psalm 99:1-5 The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake. ² Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations.

You know Jesus has a very clear foreign policy. The nations are mine. Worship me. Every nation comes to worship the one who is worthy!

Do you want to know what's happening around us? Christ is shaking the nations!

All over the world, our sovereign savior is shaking things up. He uses weather as well as revolutions—disasters and demonstrations.

Hebrews 12:26-29 ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷ The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our "God is a consuming fire."

Jesus Christ is shaking the nations to open the way for the gospel. Do you remember back in the mid 90's when Russia opened up, years of prayer were answered. That was a defining moment in our lives. Suddenly Russia was so open that they asked us to come teach Jesus in their schools!

The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

Like linemen in a football game, he brings instability to demonstrate the failure of human reason and rebellion to his throne. According to Revelation 6, the scroll unleashes conquest and war (man made disasters), as well as famine, death and earthquakes (catastrophes not in man's control).

So this is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. But He is not just a Lion, he's also the Lamb.

The Lamb

I hope you see this in the text.

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. ⁷ He came 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 the saints. ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth."

So Jesus is the redeemer of the nations. He has purchased men and women for God from every tribe and language and nations. Earlier when we heard "no one was worthy" it underscored the fact that Jesus' life and blood was entirely necessary. Now that we see the one who is worthy, we understand that his life and blood was entirely sufficient.

He has purchased people from every tribe. He will take ownership of all that he has purchased. (How many of you would walk into a car dealership, pay full price, cash, and then walk home without the car?)

For mysteries we do not understand, he has entrusted to us the declaration of this message. And that's what missions is all about.

So how are we doing almost 2,000 years since Jesus commanded us to go into all the world? Keith Green once said, "This generation of believers is responsible for this generation of souls." So how many souls are there yet to hear? Out of 7.8 Billion, approximately 3.5 Billion have yet to hear. K.P. Yohannan said:

"A tiny group of believers who have the gospel keep mumbling it over and over to themselves. Meanwhile, millions who have never heard it once fall into the flames of eternal hell without ever hearing the salvation story."

Why is there this disparity, Lord Jesus? Why have you given us so much when there is so much need? Doesn't the question answer itself?

"If ten men are carrying a log — nine of them on the little end and one at the heavy end — and you want to help, which end will you lift on?" — William Borden, as he reflected on the numbers of Christian workers in the U.S. as compared to those among unreached peoples in China

Missiologists study the task by looking at groups of people—ethnographic groups of peoples, tribes and languages. The Joshua project estimates that there are 16,500+ distinct groups around the globe. Of that number over 6,800 still have not been reached. According to Jerry Rankin, as leader of the Southern Baptist Mission, the most difficult task is restricting his budget to have to decide which unreached people group will have to go one more year without the gospel.

Will you pray, give and get involved? 40% of the world's population lives in unreached darkness. Jesus has died for the sins of these people? Will you deliver the message or keep it to yourself?

One of the ways I was highly challenged this week was reading some quotes from missionaries. Allow me to share just a few:

Sending:

“Anyone who can help 100 missionaries to the field is more important than one missionary on the field. In fact, mission mobilization activity is more crucial than field missionary activity.” --Phil Parshall

It seems like an odd quote. Don't we make much of those who go? But who will go if they are not sent? Think about it this way...why does a person ready and approved to be a missionary have to spend so much energy raising support? Why when they are ready to lay down their lives for the gospel, do they have to visit more than 50 churches for enough funds to be released?

And then when they return from the field for much deserved and needed rest, why do they have to spend half their time visit to reestablish support? Why is that?

“Not every believer has the missionary gift, but every Christian is called to some kind of involvement in missions. We are called to advance the gospel in some way and to participate in the fulfilling of God's purposes in our generation” --David Shibley

You may not go, but you can send someone. And if you have no money you can pray.

Praying:

“The history of missions is the history of answered prayer. From Pentecost to the Haystack meeting in New England and from the days when Robert Morrison landed in China to the martyrdom of John and Betty Stam, prayer has been the source of power and the secret of spiritual triumph.” --Samuel Zwemer

You know if you want to get prayer realigned—pray about missions. I mean it! John Piper, says, we've used prayer the wrong way. “We treat prayer like a household intercom to call for more comforts in the den, when in reality it is a war-time walkie-talkie to advance the troops and resources in to battle.” (paraphrased)

“Brother, if you would enter that Province, you must go forward on your knees.”

-- J. Hudson Taylor

Giving:

“Today Christians spend more money on dog food than missions” -- Leonard Ravenhill

I don't know if it's true, but what a point. Do you hear his heart? How much do we invest in feeding those starving for the bread of life? As I'm working on this sermon, and repenting, I'm thinking, “God where is my heart!?!” What am I doing? Maybe I should have a new line in my personal budget and make it compete with “dining out” or “auto insurance.” There are people who need to hear the good news.

Going:

“At the moment I put the bread and wine into those dark hands, once stained with the blood of cannibalism, now stretched out to receive and partake the emblems and seals of the Redeemer’s love, I had a foretaste of the joy of glory that well nigh broke my heart to pieces. I shall never taste a deeper bliss, till I gaze on the glorified face of Jesus himself.”

-- John G. Paton

“We talk of the second coming, half the world has never heard of the first.”

-- Oswald J. Smith

“Never pity missionaries; envy them. They are where the real action is — where life and death, sin and grace, Heaven and Hell converge.” -- Robert C. Shannon

“You must go; or send a substitute.”-- Oswald J. Smith

Eternity:

“All roads lead to the judgment seat of Christ.” -- Keith Green

This has a double impact for us. Lost souls are headed toward the judgment seat of Christ. Secondly, we too must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account. How will your accounting be for your efforts toward the unreached?

“The 3.5 billion unreached people on earth would form a single file line that would stretch around the equator 25 times! Can you picture 25 lines of Christ-less people, trampling endlessly toward hell? Let that vision stay with you day and night.” -- Larry Stockstill

Adoniram Judson, missionary to Burma, was an impeccable scholar, gifted in numerous ways, was called to repent and follow Christ. After hearing the moaning of a dying man in the next room over in an inn. In the morning he came to find out it was his former roommate, Jacob Eims, a man he had led into atheism personally. When he realized the outcome of Jacob’s life and Jacob’s terror in dying—that he has gone to eternity without Christ he couldn’t get that out of his mind. All the way down the road that day two words echoed in his soul with each step of the horse hooves—“death, hell, death, hell, death, hell...” God converted him and called him to preach to the Burmese. Adoniram used the rest of his days devoted preaching Christ to rescue thousands from hell.

Maybe some of you are called to use the twilight years of your life and be a missionary yourself. Maybe you have resources to help get the task accomplished. Maybe you can pray. Maybe you are called to raise your children encouraging them to give their life to God’s call.

The magnitude of the call to missions is so grand. Let’s begin with one step at a time. I want to encourage you to read a book on missions this year.

The Great Assembly

With all the talk about urgency, it would be easy to make too much of missions. You know we can actually make it into an idol. Idolatry is taking something other than God and making it ultimate. So I want to end where this passage ends, with the crescendo of worship to the lamb.

Our first point was that Jesus rules the nations. Next that Jesus rescues the nations. Now we see that Jesus receives the worship of the nations. Look with me at verses 11-14 where we see the great assembly.

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.

The angels alone number 200,000 or 2/3 of the population of the US. If we were to gather Americans, it would include everyone East of the Mississippi and then some! Have you ever been in a place with 100,000 people or more? Take that and multiply by 2,000. two thousand U of M stadiums filled with angelic hosts raising the roof in worship all for one supreme being—Jesus Christ, Lord.

¹² In a loud voice they sang: "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, singing: "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.

John Piper from the opening chapter of his book *Let the Nations Be Glad!* makes this wonderful insight.

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions because God is ultimate, not man.

When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal in missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory.

“The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice let the many coastlands be glad! (Psalm 97:1)

“Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the people's praise thee! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy! (Psalm 67:3-4)

Worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You cannot commend what you do not cherish.

So as you come to worship. Savor Jesus Christ, so you exalt in him. So that you can say to the nations, “rejoice with me! I found the one my soul wants more than anything in the world—Jesus! The one thing my whole mind, heart and body needs. I'm like a starving man and he has the food. Jesus is my ultimate desire.”

When you become a worshipper like that, missions is an overflow. It doesn't matter if you go to the ends of the earth or the end of the street. You cannot keep it inside. So let's all be worshippers. Let's all see Jesus for who he is.

Let's pray.