

“THE SCROLL AND THE LAMB.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

February 8, 2014, 6:00PM

Scripture Texts: Revelation 5:1-14

Introduction

Remember where we are and what’s going on. John is unfolding for us a new vision that started in chapter four. We are in heaven, we are before the throne of God, we are among those who around the throne, the four living creatures with wings, covered with eyes, the twenty four elders robed in white representing the old and new covenant people of God, the redeemed, the elect church of God.

Now another dimension is added to the vision, something absolutely necessary for its administration, a scroll that was sealed and a lion-lamb that was slain.

The Scroll that was sealed.

Let’s first consider this scroll. It’s obviously a key element in John’s vision. In this chapter the scene will be set and in chapters six through eight the seals will be broken one at a time and all will be revealed.

The scroll is described as written inside and on the back and sealed with seven seals.

What is written takes up the whole scroll. In other words, the scroll is complete, there is no room for anything else, nothing has been overlooked or left out. Whatever is said here, nothing more needs to be said.

By these seals we understand what is written is fixed and unchangeable, nothing can be added or taken away, it is perfect, incapable of being improved.

As each seal is broken a portion of the scroll will be read and when all seven seals are broken, all will be revealed.

What is this scroll? Understanding this will open up our understanding of much that remains in Revelation. It will be clearer when we get to chapters 6-8.

From chapter 6 we will see that the scroll is the scroll of God’s decrees, of God’s purposes for history, this is the explanation for all that is going to unfold. This scroll contains the secrets of God’s hand in our world’s affairs and history.

This is not just a picture of the very end of time, but a picture of what will happen from the first to the last. This is God's plan and destiny for the world. The unsealing of the scrolls signifies God's accomplishing of what He ordained and decreed.

This is the whole plan for God's kingdom, the entire progress and final consummation, a perfect and complete record down to the minutest detail, including the fall of the sparrow and the number of the hairs of our head.

Written in the book are all our trials and trouble, all our struggles and heartaches, He knows every one. Everything that weighs so heavily on our minds is already known and in the hands of Him who is on the throne.

Each step will be successively revealed, nothing before its time and kept secret until its time, until the last enemy is destroyed and final redemption is accomplished.

Where is the scroll? Who holds history? Who holds all human affairs? Who holds sway and power over all that happens in the universe? It's in the right hand of God. Despite any and all evidences to the contrary, God is utterly and absolutely in control of all human history and destiny and all the events of the universe. Nothing is outside of Him and His authority.

No one worthy to open the scroll, vss. 2-4.

An angel calls in a loud voice, a voice loud enough for all creation to hear "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

The universe is silent. There is no one, no angel in heaven, no human on earth, no devil beneath the earth, not a single creature in all the created universe is worthy. No one in all creation is competent or capable. No one can touch it, no one can do what must be done to accomplish God's will for the consummation of history and of His kingdom.

No creature has the power or right to carry out the covenant purposes of God on earth.

The universe is silent. And John wept.

Weeping in heaven? Weeping in the midst of this glorious splendor? Why does he weep? What is his heart's desire? The accomplishing of the will and purposes of God. He desires God's kingdom to come, God's will to be done.

What would happen if no one was found to open the scroll?

All we have to do is look at the rest of Revelation to find out. If the scroll was not opened:

Jesus would not be worshiped.

The martyrs would not be avenged.

The prayers of the saints would not be answered.

God's appointed plan would not come to pass.
The kingdom of God would not be established.
The wicked would not be judged.
Jesus would not come back.
God would not reign in glory in the new heavens and new earth.

If the scroll is not opened all the promises of the Bible would not be fulfilled.

Who can even imagine what it would be like if there were no Jesus? Who can even imagine a pagan wilderness of meaningless existence? Who can imagine no truth, no purity, no righteousness, no goodness, no forgiveness, no mercy, no hope of eternal life?

John weeps. He sees the importance of the scroll, that the destiny of all things hangs in the balance over whether someone can open it.

The wisest and strongest on earth cannot build or advance the kingdom. The accumulated power and wealth and wisdom of all the earth can do nothing.

Who can make sense of what's going on in the world today? Who can make sense out of the violence, the deadly terrorists, the devastating natural disasters? Who can explain famine and poverty and child abuse and disease? Why is there so much suffering, where is God in all of this?

CNN, FOX, NBC, ABC, CBS all have their expert analysts that they bring in for every situation. But who can explain the big picture, who can unfold the future? Who can penetrate into the deep mysteries of God's eternal purposes? Who is worthy, who has the wisdom, who knows the beginning from the end, who knows all things, who can comprehend the mind of God (Romans 11:33-34; I Corinthians 2:6-16)?

The Lion who has conquered.

Then one of the elders declares to John there is one worthy, one with the qualifications, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David who has conquered.

This is a fulfilment of Genesis 49:

Genesis 49:9-10 Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. ...
10 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 peoples.

Jacob prophesying over his twelve sons says a ruler will come from Judah. He will be strong, courageous, fierce, and triumphant, greatly to be feared and revered. As a lion He conquers all the foes of God.

God had promised that the great ruler would come through David who was of the tribe of Judah. Jesus isn't just a branch from that tree, He is the root. Jesus is the Son of God as well as the Son of David.

Jesus wipes away John's tears.

The Lamb who has slaughter.

What happens next must have been a startling surprise if not a complete shock for John. Looking for a fierce lion, instead he sees a lamb that looks like it has been slain.

Slain is weak here, it means slaughtered. That's what you do with lambs. This is a picture of the slaughter of the Passover lamb and the shedding of its blood.

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

He bears the marks and evidence of His slaughter. Jesus conquered by being slaughtered. It's the greatest paradox in the world. No wonder it is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks.

But that's not the whole picture. Jesus is standing. Dead things don't stand. He is alive.

And He's a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. Remember this vision is about symbols that convey meaning. Horns often represent power, He is omnipotent. Eyes often represent discernment, He is omniscient. This is symbolic of His worthiness and ability. He has the power of God and the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1:24-25).

Seven represents completeness and perfection. The seven spirits of God are the Holy Spirit in His seven-fold fullness and completeness. This seven-fold Spirit of God is sent out into all the earth to carry on the work of the Father and the Son.

What looks like total defeat turns out to be complete victory. God's purpose for the universe was accomplished on the cross.

Only a crucified and risen Savior is worthy to open the scroll. Only He is qualified to accomplish what it reveals. He shows how all the troubles of the world are meaningful and how they accomplish God's purposes.

The good news is that God will not have anyone do this except a Savior. There is great judgment in this scroll, but it will not be unleashed without a Savior from that judgment.

The cross sits at the middle of history as the focal point from which God is fully revealed and from which history gets its explanation.

The world is under a curse because of sin and at the cross the curse is broken, the debt is paid, sinners are justified, Satan is defeated and death destroyed.

The wrath of a righteous and just judge is satisfied by the only worthy mediator.

This lion-lamb is the one to whom God entrusts the scroll. We hear this truth in the NT.

Ephesians 1:22 He put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.

John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

John 5:22-23 The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.

Matthew 11:27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Matthew 28:18 All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Jesus is in control of history. Jesus is the center person in history. History is divided over Him. He controls the destiny of all that happens on this planet.

What is the purpose? That all creation would see and understand and join in praise and acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Lord of all.

The Worship that was offered.

This great act of the lamb taking the scroll becomes cause for great worship, a scene unparalleled in all the Bible. This is a new song, a song of raptured adoration.

In chapter 4 the praise was to the creator of all things.

In chapter 5 the praise is to the redeemer of all things.

This is the greatest scene in Scripture, when the slain Lamb of God, the risen Son of God is invested by God with universal dominion over all things, over everything God created.

And the universe responds with a crescendo of praise. Where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus has succeeded.

By His triumph over sin and death and hell He now is given full power and authority to resort all that was lost and redeem Adam's fallen race.

The angels worship Him as king, we worship Him as Savior. Dare I say we will love Him more than the angels, because those who have been forgiven much love much.

That Jesus is worshiped in heaven by angelic throngs and by the redeemed church and by all creatures reminds us that He is God.

That Savior who died for us is Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He alone is able to keep us safe in this life, protect us from evil and the evil one, and able to deliver us through death into eternal life.

God is above all gods, He alone claims allegiance on a universal scale. Thirteen more times in Revelation this phrase or one similar will be used to testify that heaven will be filled and God will be worshiped by people from every tribe and language and people and nation.

It is the destiny of all creation to worship God. We were created to glorify Him forever. Our true meaning and purpose and joyful fulfillment in life is found in the service of our creator and redeemer.

Eternity will not be sufficient for the praise we can give for what Christ has done and the joy that is ours because of what He has done.

Myriads upon myriads are assembled to praise God. If we ever start to feel small and insignificant on earth, if we ever feel like the church is waning, we have only to look to heaven to see all creation assembled to the glory of God to offer Him the worship due His name.

Application and conclusion.

In chapter one we saw that Jesus has the keys of death and hades. Now we see that He has the scroll of history. He has in His control everything. We have nothing to fear and every reason to worship.

Let every troubled soul and every afflicted saint look on this scene and be comforted and strengthened and filled with new joy and peace. Weep no more, the lion-lamb is on the throne and he has all power and authority over.

When you are discouraged, when you feel discouraged, when it seems to you there is no hope, look to the Lion-Lamb on the throne, look to Jesus. He is reason to hope and He will wipe away every tear.

The same hand that was nailed to the cross holds in His hands the details of your life, of your heart and soul. He understands the purpose and secures the result.

No one is worthy of absolute control in your life a part from Jesus, and no one is worthy of bringing you joy and peace a part from Jesus.

Now we are ready for the dramatic action that is about to begin in chapter 6.

Philippians 2:9-11 God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.