

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

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“The Reign of the Lion-Lamb King”

Lord's Day Morning

February 8, 2009

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Sermon Text: Revelation 4-5

Introduction

NKJ Revelation 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." 2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. 3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. 4 Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 And from the throne

proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6 Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 7 The first living creature *was* like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle. 8 *The* four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" 9 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 11 "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

To the world, Jesus of Nazareth was a mere man whose followers invented various myths which happened to have been widely believed. The Roman historian Tacitus, writing between A.D. 115 and 117, mentions the great fire in Rome in 64 A.D. and how Nero tried to pin the blame on the Christians. Tacitus says that the name Christian was taken from “Christus, who was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor. That checked the pernicious superstition for a short time, but it broke out afresh, not only in Judaea, where the plague first arose, but in Rome itself, where all the horrible and shameful things in the world collect and find a home.”

Ancient Jewish reports about Jesus are summarized this way by F.F. Bruce –

“Jesus of Nazareth was a transgressor in Israel, who practiced magic, scorned the words of the wise, led the people astray, and said he had come neither to take away from the law of Moses nor add to it. He was hanged on Passover Eve for heresy and for misleading the people.”

The end. That is all there is to this Jesus.

If Christians had taken the world’s view of Jesus, they never would have endured. But they knew, as any true

Christian still knows today, that Christ’s execution was not the end, but the beginning of the story. And one reason they knew this is because they had received this letter called The Revelation. This letter from our Lord is given to us so that we might see, know, and endure until He comes. As the heavens are opened up for us in the Apocalypse, we see Christ risen and reigning, not lying in the grave. Far from being defeated, He is victor by way of the cross, and that same road is the one He has called us to travel.

Let’s review some of the main themes then in The Revelation that are designed to enable us to remain faithful until the end. I am relying heavily here on G.K. Beale’s excellent commentary on Revelation.

I. Suffering and Victory

Every Christian suffers. Even if we do not experience formal persecution as did much of the early church, *Christians still find themselves suffering the same things as those who hate Christ.* We get sick, sometimes to death. While we enjoy gracious provision and deliverance from perils, we are not guaranteed these things. Christians die in car wrecks. They get terminal cancer – or their loved ones do. And add to this the cost of following Christ in this world – *and it is costly.* Christians are hurt or killed

by criminals. Satan hates us and sometimes, as he did Job, he harms us.

Our Lord was subject to all of these things and more when He came into this world. The world hated Him and killed Him. The world spit on Him and cursed Him. He was a man of sorrows – in fact many assumed He was even rejected by God. He died, after all, a cursed death on a tree. He had no home, no money. Yet He remained faithful, perfectly obeying His Father’s will.

And now, particularly here at chapters 4-5, we have Christ telling John – and us – “*come up here, I’ve got something to show you – something you really need to see.*” And what do we see?

We see the Lamb who was slain being given royal reception by the Father, being enthroned with all authority over heaven and earth.

The cross was not what it seemed. “*The death and defeat of Christ are, in reality, His victory over Satan. The Lamb’s followers are to recapitulate the model of His ironic victory in their own lives; by enduring through tribulation they reign in the invisible kingdom of the Messiah. They exercise kingship in the midst of their suffering just as Christ did from the cross: Christians are called to be conquerors*

by emulating in their own lives the triumph of Jesus. Though the Christian’s outer body is vulnerable to persecution and suffering, God has promised to protect the regenerated inner spirit of true saints, and, at the end of the sojourn of Christ’s body (the church) on earth, its presence, like His, will be completely removed, and then it will be resurrected.” [Beale]

Victory, you see, is arrived at only through suffering. Because Christ emptied Himself, therefore the Father has highly exalted Him and given Him that name which is above all names.

II. The Throne of the King

While the world regards Christ with little notice and contempt, our view into heaven reveals –

“The King Jesus is the center of the universe, not man’s kingdoms.”

In His sovereignty, Christ is shown by The Revelation to be the absolute sovereign and in ultimate control of all the aspects of every life, whether believer or unbeliever. The woes brought by Christ upon the world serve “*to refine the faith of believers and to punish unbelievers.*” [Beale]

The Revelation, you see, as does the rest of Scripture – shows us that Christ does not merely permit suffering, He

decrees and brings it. It is Christ the Lion-lamb who opens the seals, effecting the riding out of the horsemen. All is meant for the good of Christ's people and for judgment upon the world.

III. We Must Be Overcomers

We saw last time that the letters to the 7 churches all end with the challenge to "overcome." It is only the one who overcomes (conquers) who will inherit Christ's kingdom so vividly described as the New Heavens and New earth in the closing chapters.

And to be an overcomer means *that we must not compromise with the world*. If you will pause and think of the nature of the rebukes Christ gave His church in these letters, you will see that those rebukes are aimed at the church compromising with the world. Giving in to its seductions and temptations. The carrot of the world's friendship is always put out in front of us – ours for the taking, *if only we will compromise*. The Revelation shows us why we must never do so.

"The Bride [ie, the Church] is contrasted with the prostitute in 17:1-22:5 primarily to encourage and admonish the faltering churches, troubled by compromise with the prostitute, to stop compromising and reflect in greater measure the aspects

of the coming consummated excellence....In this respect, the churches are to read and reread this book in their assembly so that they may continually be reminded of God's real, new world which stands in opposition to the old, fallen system in which they presently live. Such a continual reminder will cause them to realize that their home is not in this old world but in the new world portrayed parabolically in the heavenly visions. Continued reading of this book will encourage genuine saints to realize that what they believe is not strange and odd, but truly normal from God's perspective. They will not be discouraged by outside worldliness, including what has crept into the churches, which is always making godly standards appear odd and sinful values seem normal. John refers to true unbelievers in the book as 'earth-dwellers' because their ultimate home is on this transient earth. They cannot trust in anything except what their eyes see and their physical senses perceive; they are permanently earthbound, trusting only in earthly security, and will perish with this old order at the end of time when the corrupted cosmos finally is judged and passes away. On the other hand, Christians are like pilgrims passing through this world. As such they are to commit themselves to the revelation of God in the new order so as progressively to reflect and imitate his

image and increasingly live according to the values of the new world, not being conformed to the fallen system, its idolatrous images, and associated values.

And one purpose of the church gathering on earth every week...is to be reminded of its heavenly identity by modeling its worship on the heavenly church's worship of the exalted Lamb. this is why scenes of heavenly liturgy are woven through the Apocalypse....It is in this manner that the churches are to learn how to worship in their gathered meetings and are to be given zeal for worship of the true God. The intended consequence is that believers experience an increasing attitude of worshipful reverence for God, not only in church assemblies, but in bowing to divine sovereignty in every aspect of their lives and in every facet of its outworking. [Beale]

You see, then, Christian – that the world constantly screams at us and allures us *to worship its idols to think its values, to be silent about the name of Jesus – to, namely, just fit in.* But we must not. We cannot. We must overcome. Where might each one of us need to re-examine ourselves for compromise, for the spirit of the Laodiceans?

IV. The King Receives His Throne

NKJ Revelation 5:1 And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" 3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. 4 So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. 5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." 6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. 8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and

nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" 13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power *Be* to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" 14 Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

This, we believe, is the heavenly scene which immediately followed the ascension of Christ –

NKJ Acts 1:9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up

into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

This is not the world's take on the crucifixion – but here is the reality.

NKJ Acts 2:29 "Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 "Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, 31 "he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. 32 "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. 33 "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. 34 "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, 35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." ' 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

The Lamb reigns over all, *and He has the scroll. He is worthy to break its seals.* As the ensuing events upon earth demonstrate as the seals are broken, this scroll is God's decree by which He redeems and judges this world, remedying the effects of sin, punishing the wicked with perfect justice, and bringing all of creation out of the effects of the fall and the curse. Jesus is worthy to do this, because by His blood He has redeemed us. He has paid the price. He is bringing His enemies to their end and rescuing His people from their hand.

NOTE: We must always keep the Exodus in mind as we study The Revelation. We will see more of this later, but for now realize that The Revelation is an account of the Lord judging Egypt (the world), bringing plagues upon the wicked, *for the purpose of freeing His people and taking them to a Land where they can dwell in His presence, free from enemies, disease, and death.*

The Scroll and its Seals