

The Book of Destiny

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Well, let's take our Bibles this morning and turn to the book of Revelation. I was going to give you the page number, but if you can't find this book you are in serious trouble. I think it is page 1030 in the church Bible. Start at the end, turn left and you are right there.

We have been looking the last two, these two Sunday mornings that I have been here we have been looking at this second vision, this second vision in the book of Revelation, at least the intro to the second vision. The first vision begins with an introduction in which John sees the Son of Man as the Priest and the King and the Prophet who addresses his churches. Chapters two and three describe the seven churches in their corporate life and they are in a bit of a state. They are not in a good place, really. And then the second vision begins with this vision of the throne in heaven in chapter four. We looked at that last Sunday morning if you were here. And then in chapter five on the throne one seated how has a book in his hand. And that is the introduction. And in then in chapters six through eight we see the seven seals opened, the seals that are sealing the book are opened. And what is contained in it is then unfolded and initiated in the world.

So let's read chapter five verse one.

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. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" 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. 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."

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. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 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. 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,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

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, 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!” 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!” And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.¹

It is one of those readings, isn't it? Once you have finished it you expect the preacher to say, “Amen, sit down.” You should be so lucky.

Well, you could ask the question: What is it you say to people, people like John who is in prison for the testimony of Jesus Christ languishing far away from a church that is supportive or the people of God who would give him company and fellowship and friendship? What do you say? What do you say to the people in these seven churches that we read about in chapters two and three, churches that are a disaster, shot through with all kinds of doctrinal error and moral laxity and compromise, a church that was feeling under the vice, as it were, of a culture and a world system that is absolutely against it. They feel as if they are going against the flow of history and that small in numbers as they are, their future is very uncertain.

What do you say to people who are grieving, mourning over the loss of loved ones who have lost their job or lost their career because of their commitment to Jesus Christ, their business life is dried up because it is word has got out to the community that they are the followers of Jesus. What do you say to encourage people like that? What do you say to those who are facing martyrdom?

I suppose you could give them some strategies, though I am not quite sure what strategies to cope with getting burned at the stake you could possibly give to people or thrown to the lions. I don't know what you say to them. Put your head in first? Cut your carotid? That is the end quicker than other part of you? Whatever. I am not sure what kind of practical advice you give.

¹ Revelation 5:1-14.

Well, I know what God gave. God gave this vision of Jesus Christ to John for the churches. He gave this vision for us.

And the center of this vision, as you saw in chapter four, is the throne of God, that at the center of the universe there is command and control center from which all events are being determined and coordinated and controlled. There is someone at the heart of the universe before whom every creature and every Christian bows in acknowledgment. He is the Lord God almighty we are told in verse eight of chapter four, the Lord God almighty.

And chapter five is about the business of telling us that Jesus holds your present and your future in his hands. That is where we are going. That is the big idea. Let's see how we get there.

First of all, there is a book that is written by the almighty. There is a book that has been written by the almighty.

“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.”²

So we are starting back at the throne again. We are reminded of absolute sovereignty. We are reminded that there is one who is supreme in his holiness, his worthiness and his almightiness. That is what chapter five has declared.

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”³

He is in absolute control of history. He is the object of heaven's worship. He has created all things and he is seated on the throne with a book.

What is this book? Well, there is a background in the Old Testament. For example, in Ezekiel chapter two there is a book of judgment that Ezekiel refers to. He describes a throne. He describes the hand of the one stretched out from the throne and in the hand the scroll of a book that was in his hand. And the words of the book he tells us, were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

In Daniel we read about a book, a book that is in the hand of the Ancient of Days and Daniel is told to shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end. In other words, the book contains what is to happen in the future, both our present and our future is recorded in the book.

Isaiah 29:11 talks about a book like this.

“And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed.”⁴

² Revelation 5:1.

³ Revelation 4:8.

Well, here is a sealed book in the right hand of him who is seated on the throne.

Daniel in chapter seven describes the Ancient of Days seated on his throne and the books were opened.

Now we are being told that as a result of the work of Jesus Christ by his death and his resurrection, we are going to discover what is in that book that is in the hand of the maker.

Well, what is in the book? Is it a book of redemption? Is this what is later described as the Lamb's book of Life? Is this the record of the names of all of God's people, his elect, those chosen before the foundation of the world?

Well, it may very well be that that is an element of what is in this book. Certainly chapter in the midst of the seals, the unsealing of the seals, we are told about another sealing that goes on, the sealing of God's people. They are sealed, perhaps sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. They are marked out of the world. They are stamped with a stamp of God's ownership. They belong to him. They are his. And whatever else is going on in the world, while wars are raging, what false prophets are afflicting the church dressed as if they are the Lord Jesus himself, false Christ's, false prophets. Whatever persecution is afflicting the Church of God these people are sealed. There is 144,000 of them, a perfect number sealed by God, millions of them around the throne, multitudes of people from every nation, all the tribes, peoples, languages standing before the throne.

God records the names of those whose names are in the Lamb's book of Life, but it is also a book of judgment, a book of destiny.

In fact, this book sealed and written on on both sides resembles a Roman will or contract deed in which case, I think we are meant to see this sealed scroll as a kind of new covenant document that contains the record of all the covenant promises and curses that God has written for his new covenant people This is the secret book of judgment and redemption, of destiny. This book contains the decrees of God.

Now you know what the decrees of God are. They are the decrees of his eternal purpose according to the counsel of his will by which he has ordained whatever comes to pass. Here is God's book of destiny.

Back in Isaiah, in Isaiah 46 God says, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me."⁵ And here is what differentiates God from all the other idols of the nations. It is this.

"I declare the end from the beginning. That is what I do and from ancient times I declare things that are not yet done. I am God and there is none besides me."

⁴ Isaiah 29:11.

⁵ Isaiah 46:9.

In Ephesians 1:11, “the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”⁶

Here is a book of destiny, then. It is absolutely comprehensive. It covers all of history. It covers all the unfolding purposes of God throughout the human story. And you notice that it is written in the back and on the front. There are no gaps. There are no comments, places for us to add our comments. There are no alternative strategies required. This will of God is fixed. This will of God is final. This will of God is absolutely reliable, trustworthy. He is able to initiate events and he stands behind the process of history as it unfolds up to and including the return of the Lord Jesus and the renewal of the cosmos at the end of history. This book tells a story of men and nations. This book tells a story of institutions and movements. This book tells your story and my story. It is all written, captured in this book.

This is the book of destiny. This book tells me that behind the confusion that we find in our world, behind the randomness of events as they appear to me, behind the frustrations that I feel that life is not working out the way it ought for me, behind all of this there is the throne of God and the book of destiny that God himself has written.

That means you don't have to decline, you don't have to devolve into that kind of default setting of many people of cynicism. Life is bad. Get on with it.

I mean, I say that to some of my staff sometimes. Living with me is bad. Get on with it. But that is the kind of default setting of default setting of cynicism, isn't it, in the human heart. If that is our response to life.

All this in default of Romanticism. Life is bad? Really? Oh, no. No, the Christian's response is neither the Romantics nor the cynics. The Christian's response is to say, “All of history whatever unfolds is in the hands of this one who sits not eh throne.”

So there is a book that has been written by God the almighty. Secondly, there is a book that is withheld from us the unworthy. Yes, you notice that. Who is worthy? That is the question that rings around heaven and is a kind of scandal written into this vision.

Remember four and five are one vision. So the end of chapter four we are told, “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.”⁷

Worthy are you. Now the question. Who is worthy? Who is worthy to take the scroll from the right hand of him who sits upon the throne? And the answer, the answer is that no one, no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth is able to open the scroll or to look into it. No one, no one from among God's creatures found was able to execute God's big plan of redemption and judgment. No angel, no archangel, no cherub or seraph or none of

⁶ Ephesians 1:11.

⁷ Revelation 4:11.

these great figures that appeared in the book of Revelation, none of these creatures able to take the scroll and unfold its destiny.

Who is there in all creation? Is there a man? Is there a patriarch? Is there a prophet? Is there a holy man of God? Is there a preacher? Is there a church leader? Is there anyone in all creation who can take the scroll and open it and unfold history?

It is silence. There is no one.

Silence is eloquent of the bankruptcy of humanity. This book is withheld from us, the unworthy. We fall short. Hence, all the attempts of humanity to find meaning in history, all of the attempts of humanity to find purpose and meaning in life end in frustration.

If I can borrow the words of Churchill, Winston Churchill or use them in another context, the story of humanity and the outworking of history on the future of the world is a riddle wrapped in an enigma, a riddle wrapped in enigma.

So John is in despair. Do you see that? He says, "I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll to look into it." He understands the implications. He looks at this church that he represents. He looks at his own circumstances there in the prison. He looks at these churches in the world and he thinks, "Look at them, look at them." Two of them are nearly extinct. Three of them are in seriously compromised theological and morally conditions. Only two of them get any credit.

This is the Church. This is what it looks like in the world. What is the future of this organization? Does it have a future? And he weeps. But he weeps for another reason because I think in the back of his mind he is asking the question, "Where is my Lord Jesus in this scenario here?"

He is the one seated on the throne. He is the almighty, the Lord, God almighty. Here are the elders around the throne, the representatives of the Church on earth. None of them are worthy. Shouldn't there be one who is worthy? What about my Lord Jesus?

As we watch Paul watch John weep this is very often where we stop. We weep. We empathize with John as he weeps because we have wept, too. Some of us have wept with bitter disappointment because we can't understand the mystery of human existence. We weep over the enigma's of life. We have been disappointed, disillusioned with human leaders, human institutions.

We, too, see no point of human history. Some of us have wept because there is no answer to the problem of pain. We cannot explain the existence of evil. We have wept. Some of us have wept for another reason. We have wept for frustration. We have wept with sheer anger that there should be such a book, that there should be such power anywhere in the universe outside of ourselves. We have wept in frustration because we have wanted to be the author of our own destiny, the master of our own fate, our own Savior and Lord. We

have wept with anger that there should be any mention of such a book in the hands of one who is almighty.

So who is worthy? What are we looking for?

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Well, in the context of Revelation and I think the context of the whole of the Bible, there is this idea in Revelation that what is happening here is paradise lost and paradise regained. That is certainly the book ends of the Bible, isn't it? Paradise in Eden at the beginning, lost because of sin, paradise at the end in the new Eden, in the new heaven and earth regained by the work of Christ on behalf of his people.

And in the book of Revelation that is an underlying theme throughout this book, this idea of paradise lost and regained. And how was it lost? A man lost it. A man lost it. A human being, someone like us lost it.

What we need to regain it. What we need is a man in the scenario, a human being. And there is none, well, at least not yet.

For this book that is written by the almighty and withheld from us the unworthy is opened and unsealed by the Redeemer.

Look at this as he tells the story to us.

“And one of the elders said to me, ‘Weep no more.’”⁸

One of the elders, notice, one of those who were representatives of the Church gets to preach the gospel to John, announces the good news to John and to us. There is someone. There is someone from among you, from among the people of God. There is one who is worthy.

This one is, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”⁹

Now he is drawing from the Old Testament where way back in Genesis 49 verse nine out of all of humanity, out of the sons of Abraham there is child from the clan of Judah who will be the king and to him shall the obedience of the nations be. And he will be the one who will rule, who rules, the ruler's staff and the scepter shall not depart from Judah until he comes.

Isaiah picks this up in Isaiah 11. He says, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”¹⁰

⁸ Revelation 5:5.

⁹ Revelation 5:6.

¹⁰ Isaiah 11:1.

“In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”¹¹

He is picking up that prophecy in Genesis 49. And he says two things about this one who is coming. He is saying on the one hand this one who is coming will be descended from Judah and David. He will be of the tribe of Judah and the lion of David. He will be the branch or he will be the one from the stump of Jesse. Here is the royal household of David and it is decimated by disobedience. It is almost obliterated from history because of disobedience. And yet the promises no matter how low it sinks, no matter how bad things get, God will bring from that stump, he will bring forth a branch that will be the eternal, the everlasting ruler of God’s people.

But he is saying something else. Isaiah says it. He says something else. Not only is he the branch, but he is also the root. He is not only descended from David, he is the one from whom both David’s and Judah’s authority came in the first place. He is the source of authority. He is the source of this royalty.

Now this was very important to the early Christians. When Paul is announcing the gospel of God in Romans chapter one he says this:

The gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh.¹²

That is the one. John, hears this. The lion of the tribe of Judah, the king, the Messiah, the one Isaiah spoke about, the one Genesis spoke about, the one God promised. He is the one who has conquered. Behold the lion.

And he tries to see the lion. And you know the story. He turns to see the lion and what does he see standing there?

Remember, this is picture language. Revelation 1:1, it is a revelation in symbols. It is a revelation in pictures. It is kind of comic book stuff. So you have to use your imagination. I know that doesn’t come easy to some, especially those of you who are scientists, doctors. You have no imagination. Bless you, but you can get to heaven, too.

So try this morning. Use your imagination.

He turns to see the lion, but what does he see? He sees the lamb. He sees a little lamb. It is a diminutive that is used in the original, a dear little lamb he said who had just been slain standing among the elders, coming out from among the people of God, there he stands.

Oh, John knows who it is, of course. John had heard John the Baptist or certainly take

¹¹ Isaiah 11:10.

¹² Romans 1:1-3.

notes of John the Baptist proclaiming to the people, not, “Behold the lion.” He had heard John the Baptist say, “Behold the lamb of God who take away the sin of the world.”¹³

He knew who this Lamb was. This is the Lamb that Abraham promised to Isaac.

“God will provide a lamb, my son.”

This is the lamb slain at the Passover so that the children, those boys would not die on the night God judged Egypt. This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the Lamb of God that Isaiah spoke about, the Lamb of God who went in our place to the place of judgment. This is the Lamb of God who has come like a lamb to the slaughter who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, who took the punishment that was coming to us on himself. This is the Lamb of God on whom God caused all of our iniquities to be laid. This is the Lamb of God. Behold the Lamb.

And the lion conquers by coming to us, by becoming the Lamb of God. He conquers by suffering as the Lamb of God because he is as he was slain. Do you notice that? And he stands there with the marks of his slaying on him.

Back in chapter one he is the Son of Man. John has delighted to describe him in his splendor and glory as the heavenly Son of Man clothed like a king and a priest, speaking like a prophet to his Church, but from this point on John’s favorite expression for the Lord Jesus is going to be the Lamb of God. The Lamb of God is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Then there is that perfectly balanced description of the Lamb of God at the end of the book where he is describing the holy city, the new Jerusalem that comes down out of God from heaven. And he says about that city, “has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”¹⁴

There is a very clear description of Jesus’ deities, his divinity. There he is one with God. Who is the light of the new city? Is it the almighty or is it the Lamb? Well, the answer is both, because the Lamb is worthy. The Lamb is worthy.

And all of those prophecies of the triumphant king find their final victory, their final fruition in the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross. What a way to get victory. This lion wins by losing. This king gains his crown by losing his life, by losing his dignity, by losing his self worth, by losing everything for his people.

This is a different kind of king. This is a different kind of victory and it changes the way we look at Jesus. From that point on who are we? We are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. That is language in the book of Revelation.

¹³ John 1:29.

¹⁴ Revelation 21:23.

We are those who have washed our robes in his blood, the blood of the Lamb. We are those who, because of our connection to him, guess what? We overcome Satan because of the blood of the Lamb. It is so counter intuitive, this. Those who follow Jesus follow him in the way of suffering.

John, you are in prison. You are following the Lamb.

Church, you are suffering from false teaching. You are following the Lamb.

Church, you are suffering from persecution. You are following the Lamb.

Church, the world hates you. You are following the Lamb by way of suffering, by way of rising from the dead as the Lamb of God is standing. Do you notice that? He is standing as though it had been slain. He is risen. He is alive. John has already seen that chapter one.

“Behold, I am he that lives, who lives and was dead and, behold, I am alive forevermore.”

And he has power. Do you notice how he reigns there? He stands with seven horns, seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent into all the earth.

John is saying two things here. Your Lord Jesus is, if you will, spatially in glory. He is in the throne room. He is in charge. But where you are, John in your prison, you folks in these churches in Laodicea, in Philadelphia or wherever, where you are, he is with you by the power of his Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit spoke to those seven churches, so the Spirit in the seven fold perfection of his offices who is absolutely strong like the ox and its horns locked in to attack, all power concentrated there, him with the eyes who sees and knows all that is going on in the world, all that is going on in your life, all that is going on in your heart, all those questions you are asking in the quiet of the night when you wake up and you are in despair or you are doubting. Who whose seven eyes are there seeing your circumstances, hearing your call, he is active with you by the power of his Holy Spirit. That is how Jesus rules the Church today. He is in heaven located, but by the Holy Spirit he is with every believer in this room. And he reigns. And he approaches the throne.

He went up and he takes the scroll from the right hand of him who is seated on the throne.

It is the movement in the heavenly temple. Here is the Lamb. He has been slain on the altar and then miraculously raised from the dead. He enters into the holiest of all. The curtain has been torn. He enters into the holiest of all. He approaches the ark of the covenant at the end of the holy of holies. He goes to that space between the cherubim that is the throne of God over which God reigns and he takes from the very throne, from the hand of God he takes your destiny and mine into his own hands.

This is our Lord Jesus exalted, lifted up.

Brothers and sisters, your Lord Jesus who loves you has your destiny in his hands. You don't need to fear. Who have we to fear? Who can do anything? Who can bring any charge against us? What can do anything to us? Life, death, tribulation, whatever it is, what can do anything to the child of God?

Though goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also.
The body they may kill,
God's truth abideth still.
His kingdom is forever.

That is just the way it is because the Lamb is worthy. The Lamb is worthy.

“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.”¹⁵

You are there, you notice. You are there. Your prayers, they are all there. They are all being fulfilled in this great strategic act of Jesus Christ. Every night children in the Old Testament cried out, “Oh, God, when are going to send the Messiah?”

It is all answered here.

Every night you have cried out, “How long, oh Lord? How long?”

It is answered here.

Every night of weeping, every day of struggle, every moment of anxiety that you have directed heavenward is captured here and you have been told the answer to the prayers of God's people, the answer to your prayers is being answered in the triumph of the Lamb.

Do you believe that? Has your heart gripped that? Have your affections been awakened by that truth?

And so they sing this new song

“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.”¹⁶

You are a believing person. Listen to me today. You know. You are part of this number, this ransomed number. You are being bought with his blood. You have been liberated, delivered, rescued by his blood. And wherever you go in the world, wherever these

¹⁵ Revelation 5:8.

¹⁶ Revelation 5:9.

workers that we have commissioned today go in the world, they are going to find people who have been redeemed, ransomed from every tribe and nation and people to our God.

Not only has he ransomed us, but he has made us a people. He has given us a new identity. He has made us a kingdom of priests to serve God so that we can one day reign on the earth. All the promises of God, you see, to Israel have become ours. We share in it. We are the also rans. The gospel is for the Jew first and then for the Gentiles and here we are Gentiles, most of us in this room, I guess. And we have been brought in and the covenant promises of God are ours and we shall inherit the earth. All things are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's.

Well, when that note of worthiness is sounded, then everybody wants to get in on the act. Do you notice that?

“Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures,”¹⁷ representative of all creation, the elders representing all the redeemed, many angels, myriads, millions and millions, hundreds of thousands...

“...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!’”¹⁸

When we were growing up a little children's hymn we sang, a little phrase about the angels. They know not Christ as Savior, but worship him as King.

So do we. We join with them because we know him as Savior as well as king. Here they are joining with this heavenly choir. Everything that has breath is now praising the Lamb.

And do you notice? It is to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. What clearer christology can you have? What clearer message of where Jesus is in the scheme of things?

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And we ascribe all praise and glory to him.

And there is this cosmic amen.

I have to say to you that I think you and I as God's people we need a fresh vision of Jesus as he is in his splendor and glory. Somehow we need, you know, we are so turned in on ourselves, so preoccupied with our own needs and our own burdens and our wants and wishes and frustrations and so on.

And I know some of us may need help at that level to kind of untangle some of that mess, but ultimately, ultimately what all of us need is what these beleaguered believers needed

¹⁷ Revelation 5:11.

¹⁸ Revelation 5:12.

in the first century and what beleaguered believers in every century have needed and that is to see this glorious Jesus.

A man called Paschal, a great scientist and mathematician had an experience where this overwhelming view of the Lord Jesus in his exaltation gripped him and injected into his whole being. It was as if his whole being caught fire as he saw the glory of Jesus.

He wrote in a document they found stitched into his clothes when he died these words.

“Twenty-third of November, 1654. Fire. From about half past 10 in the evening till half past midnight the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, not the god of the philosophers and the men of science, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Let me leave that with you today. This is the one before whom the living creatures and the elders fall and they say their amen and they fall down and they worship him who sits upon the throne and the Lamb who is worthy of our praises.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you have called us into the fellowship of the Lamb to follow him wherever he goes and one day to sit with him in those heavenly places. Lord, will you unlock our hearts, will you put that fire into them that we might today feel that we have been in the presence of almighty God? We pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.