

Apocalyptic Hope: The Throne and the Lamb

Revelation 4-5

Where we are in the story...

Revelation is an apocalypse...an unveiling. John is being shown the reality behind what he and the churches can see. This is a book written to people who have plenty of reasons to be afraid. Rome is powerful, John is exiled on the island of Patmos, and the churches are facing persecution, pressure, temptation, and compromise. However, Revelation keeps unveiling something different.

In Revelation 1, Jesus is alive and present. John encounters the resurrected Jesus in the middle of his own suffering. Jesus is walking among the lampstands (the churches) and He is still dwelling among His people. (Read Revelation 1:17b-18.) Jesus is **alive, present with His churches, and holds the future in His hands**.

In Revelation 2-3, Jesus knows His church. Jesus speaks to 7 real churches experiencing different circumstances. Some are suffering. Some are compromising. Some have become comfortable. Some are enduring. But the repeated call to each church is to **remain faithful**. Each letter ends with a promise to the one who “conquers” or “overcomes.”

If you missed those messages, you can catch up on www.theproject.community/podcasts/media. While this document outlines most of the message, it does not always include all examples and explanations. The audio of the full message is available also on the website.

John’s Vision:

Read Revelation 4:1-2. John sees an open door into heaven. He is invited to see his world from another perspective. The first thing he sees is **not** a beast, battle, destruction, or judgement. That is coming (Revelation 6-20 contains some of the most disturbing imagery in Scripture). But first, he is shown a throne. This is important. Before God shows John what is happening on earth, He shows John what is true in heaven.

The Throne:

Read Revelation 4:2-6. Everything is oriented around the throne

- On the throne — the One who sits there. (4:2–3)
- Around the throne — twenty-four elders. (4:4)
- From the throne — lightning and thunder. (4:5)
- Before the throne — lamps and a sea like glass. (4:5–6)
- Around the throne — four living creatures. (4:6)

There is plenty we could try to decode here, but all of it is pointing John’s attention in the same direction... the throne.

The world John lives in might look like it revolves around Caesar/Rome, but that’s not the reality revealed to him. He sees that the throne is occupied. God has not abandoned His creation, God has not surrendered His authority, and God has not lost control of history.

This does not mean that everything that happens on earth is good or that God causes bad things to happen. It means that none of those things have displaced God from the throne. The One on the throne is faithful.

The One on the Throne:

One detail worth noting is in verse 3...*“And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.”*

The rainbow encircles the throne. From earth we only see in part, but from heaven the circle is complete. It shines like an emerald: symbolic of life, growth, and renewal. This is an interesting image when we remember where Revelation is heading. *“Behold, I am making all things new.”* (Revelation 21:5)

But the rainbow also reminds us of something from much earlier in Scripture. In Genesis 9, God places the rainbow in the clouds as a sign of His covenant with Noah and all living creatures. It is a reminder of God’s faithfulness and mercy even after the judgment of the flood. God makes a promise concerning His creation.

Also notice where this rainbow is. It is surrounding the throne. John is about to see some pretty disturbing things (evil, suffering, destruction, and judgment) but before any of that happens he sees a reminder of God’s faithfulness.

We also have 2 gemstones: Jasper and ruby (sardius and carnelian). Both are found among the twelve stones on the High Priest’s breastplates instructed by God in Exodus 28. They are the first and last stones in the traditional arrangement representing the 12 tribes of Israel. The first and the last (beginning and end) gemstones are:

- Ruby = Ruben = 1st born of Jacob
- Jasper = Benjamin = 12th born of Jacob

These gemstones also represent judgment and righteousness. The brilliance of jasper can remind us of God’s holiness and righteousness. The fiery red of ruby can call to mind justice and judgment.

John is looking at a holy, righteous, and powerful God, but surrounding the throne is a reminder of His covenant faithfulness and mercy. This is important for how we understand the rest of Revelation.

God’s judgment is not disconnected from His character. The God who judges is the same God who loves His creation and promises to restore it. His holiness, justice, and mercy are not competing characteristics. God delights in showing mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. But - more about that next week...

Worship of the One on the Throne:

Read Revelation 4:9-11. Chapter 4 ends with worship and the reason for their worship is significant. God is worthy because He is the Creator. Everything exists because of Him. Creation belongs to Him and He has not abandoned what He created.

But that introduces a question. If God created everything, and everything belongs to Him, What is He going to do about what has happened to His creation?

We all know the world is not how it should be. There is suffering, violence, injustice, death, fear, pain, and brokenness. We have a Creator who is worthy of worship, but how is this broken creation going to be made right?

The Scroll:

Read Revelation 5:1-4. In John’s day, important documents were written on scrolls. This one is in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. It is sealed with 7 seals. 7 is a recurring number in Revelation that represents completeness.

There are different interpretations of exactly what this scroll contains, but broadly, it represents God’s purposes for bringing history toward its intended conclusion: confronting evil,

bringing judgment and justice, calling humanity to repentance, and ultimately bringing restoration to creation.

Think about where this story is headed... *"Behold, I am making all things new."* But how do we get from the broken world we see now to that promised restoration? The opening of this scroll begins to reveal that process.

In the next chapters, we will see seals opened; trumpets, bowls, beasts, Babylon, and spiritual conflict; evil exposed and judgment unfold; and ultimately, evil and death defeated. We will get into more of that next week

Remember what John has already seen. The throne is occupied. The God on the throne is holy, just, faithful, and merciful. Everything that follows must be understood in light of who is sitting on the throne.

John Weeps:

There is a problem. Who is worthy to open the scroll? No one is found and John weeps. Why? This scroll represents God's purposes for bringing His broken creation toward restoration.

Imagine that someone you love needs an emergency surgery to save their life. It requires a skill set though that is nearly impossible to gain. Few people have been known to be able to do this kind of work. The search is on to find a surgeon who can perform this life-saving operation but none can be found. Hope was there then it was lost.

John sees the promised hope of restoration in the right hand of the One on the throne, but no one could be found who could open it. Who is going to confront evil? Who will bring justice? Who will put things right? Who can defeat death?

If no one can open the scroll... What happens to the promise of Revelation 21? What happens to the hope of all things being made new?

John is looking at a broken world and cannot see anyone capable of making it right. I think we can all relate to that feeling of hopelessness. We look at the world around us and wonder how things could possibly get any better. We see it in our communities, families, governments, and relationships. The things I hear and see working with people right here in our community make it hard for me to stay hopeful sometimes. We all know that things are not how they should be, but we don't always know what can be done about it.

John's tears reflect the hopelessness of a world that cannot save itself. Then someone speaks...

Worthy to Open the Scroll:

Read Revelation 5:5. The elder tells John "Do not weep!" Not because suffering and evil are over, but because someone has been found who is worthy!

The Lion of the tribe of Judah was prophesied in Genesis 49 when Jacob blesses his son Judah. There is imagery of a lion and the promise of kingship. A ruler would come from the family line of Judah.

The Root of David is a prophecy from Isaiah 11. The Messiah was promised to come from the family line of David. He will be the King who will rule with righteousness and bring justice.

John is being told that the promised King has come. The Lion has conquered. He is worthy to open the scroll. So John looks for the Lion...

Read Revelation 5:6. John hears that the Lion has conquered but when he looks, he sees a Lamb. Not just any lamb though. A Lamb that looks as though it has been slaughtered...yet the Lamb is standing.

This imagery connects with the larger biblical story.

- (Exodus 12) The Passover lamb and Israel's deliverance
- (Isaiah 53:7) The suffering servant led like a lamb to the slaughter
- (John 1:29) "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
- (1 Corinthians 5:7) "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."

We see the Lamb throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament, the lamb is on the altar. In the Gospels, the Lamb is on the cross. In Revelation, the Lamb is on the throne.

The sacrifice of the Lamb cannot be forgotten. He appears as if He has been slain but He lives! The evidence remains. The sacrifice was real. His death was real. But death did not win! He is alive! He is victorious!

Remember what Jesus told John in Revelation 1? "*I was dead, and not look, I am alive for ever and ever!*" Now John sees that reality in the throne room. The Lamb's wounds tell us what He endured. His standing tells us that He overcame. (Psalm 22) "*He has done it!*"

Worship of Jesus:

Read Revelation 5:7-14. The chapter begins with John weeping in hopelessness. Then he sees the Lamb and everything changes. The four living creatures and the 24 elders fall down in worship. Then thousands upon thousands of angels join in crying out, "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.*" Then every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and on the sea joins in. The incense is the prayers of God's people.

The Lamb turns weeping into worship. But notice what has not happened yet. The seals haven't been opened. Rome hasn't fallen. The churches are still facing persecution. Evil hasn't been finally removed. Death hasn't disappeared. God hasn't wiped away every tear.

The circumstances John faced haven't changed...but John has seen the Lamb and that changes how he understands everything that comes next.

The Hope of Revelation:

Revelation doesn't ask us to pretend the world isn't broken...John weeps. It doesn't promise that God's people won't suffer...the churches already are. It doesn't tell us that everything between here and the restoration of creation will be easy.

Instead, Revelation pulls back the curtain to show us something we cannot always see from the middle of the brokenness. The Lamb is on the throne! That is the hope that Revelation offers us. Not that everything is ok, that suffering isn't real, or that evil will simply disappear without being confronted...but that the world is not abandoned to its brokenness. The One on the throne is faithful, the Lamb has conquered, and the future of creation rests in His hands. Christian hope allows us to worship in the middle of the story because we know who holds the ending.

When John entered the throne room, he saw something that changed the way he understood everything happening around him in life. He saw a God who had not abandoned His creation. He saw a Lamb who had been slain - but was standing. He heard heaven declare that the Lamb was worthy.

I don't know what you brought into this room today...grief, exhaustion, hopelessness,... God isn't asking us to pretend that the things we are facing isn't real, He is inviting us to see

something beyond them. The throne is occupied. The Lamb is standing. And God is making all things new.

We don't have to wait until everything is made right to worship the One who will make it right. We can join the song of heaven right now because even here - in the middle of the story...The Lamb is worthy!

Reflection Questions:

- What aspects of God's character and splendor cause you to praise and worship Him?
- In Revelation 4, the elders cast their crowns (given to them by God) before the throne in worship. What has God given you that you can use to worship Him?
- In Revelation 5, John feels hopelessness and weeps when no one is found to be worthy of opening the scroll. Have you ever felt hopeless with circumstances?
 - John finds hope when he sees the Lamb who is worthy. How does this whole scene in Revelation 4-5 provide you with hope?