

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## Great Chapters of the Bible: Revelation 5

The chapter for our meditation this morning is truly one of the great chapters of the Bible. It is Revelation chapter 5 and in it we hear one of the greatest challenges that has ever been made. It comes from the very throne of God and moreover there is someone who can respond to it.

First of all let us ask the question: when does this scene take place? I think that can be answered first by reference to the placement of the chapter in the Book of Revelation together with a perusal of the facts that are given to us in it, and from this I think we can be left in no doubt as to the time when this event is taking place.

In chapters 1 to 3 we have what we might call a brief history of the Church on earth, and this has been taken up in previous Truth for Today programmes; it goes right on to the coming of the Lord. Chapter 4 begins with the words "after these things" and immediately we are transported to Heaven. The Church is not heard of again until we come to the chapters 19 and 20 where we read of the Lord's return to earth with His saints and the beginning of His millennial reign, but in chapter 5 we find a company that are singing the Song of Redemption, and we will say a little more about this company in a moment or two. But these facts alone would indicate that this period has reference to that short space of time between chapter 3 and chapter 19. The Church has been called home to glory and a time of terrible judgement is about to take place on earth.

In chapter 4 the throne is predominant, and the one who sits upon it, as 4:8 and 19:4 clearly state, is none other than the Lord God Almighty. This would bring to our attention, bearing in mind that which is about to take place, the authority and the government of God.

In chapter 5 it is the Lamb who is predominant and we will have to say more on this in a little while. In 4:4 we read that the first company that surround the throne is twenty four Elders. They are clothed in white, they are seated on thrones and they are crowned. Who are they? Well, if you turn to 1 Chronicles 24 you will find there that the old priestly hierarchy of Israel was divided into twenty four courses. In Luke 1:5 we find that John the Baptist's father, the priest Zacharias, was of the Course of Abijah. I believe that this company of Elders that we are considering is a kind of anti-type to that company of which we read in Chronicles. Revelation 1:6 speaks of a kingdom of priests - hence the thrones and crowns. They are clothed in white. They are carrying out a priestly service. They have golden bowls full of incense which the scripture says are the prayers of the saints. Whose prayers we ask. Certainly not their own. They are already in Heaven. They are, in fact, the prayers of those upon earth who, despite the terrible time through which the earth is passing, are a company that is faithful to God. A remnant in a world of wickedness. It is important to notice that in verse 9 the word 'us' "redeemed us to God" should be omitted and the word 'we' "we shall reign on earth" in verse 10 should really be "they shall reign on the earth". Two points may be made here. First, how beautiful to notice the sympathy and affection of these redeemed Elders in Heaven for their suffering brethren on earth; and, secondly, to notice that prayers on earth are incense in Heaven. Surely this company of twenty four Elders represents the whole, the complete company of the redeemed and, fellow believers, you and I are there.

Then we read that there are four living creatures, not beasts - that is a very bad word, there are four living creatures that surround the throne, having the likeness of a lion, a calf, a man and an eagle, which I believe denotes strength, patient endurance, intelligence and rapidity. Again such characteristics would be in conformity with what is about to take place. Additionally in 5:9 we find that many angels are present. In fact ten thousand times ten thousand, that is a hundred million; whether this figure is literal or factual makes very little difference. The point is that all the heavenly hosts join together in the worship which follows.

Now we read in the first verse that on the hand of Him that is seated upon the throne is a book, properly a scroll, and it is written within and on the back side. Normally the scroll would only be written on the inside, but the impression is given that there is so much to write, the account is so full, that it spills over onto the back side. What is the subject of its content? I think that there can be very little doubt. It is a full account of the purposes of God for the world.

Refer to Genesis 6:5 and you will find God looking down upon this world. What does he see? He sees that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, continually". What follows? Well, it is judgement. In that case the judgement of the flood.

Here we have something very similar. Since the death of His Son and His making salvation available for all men, God has been looking down on this world and what does He see? Very similar to what He saw in Genesis. Rampant wickedness increasing and one might say almost day by day. Now the climax has been reached. He has called His own to the glory, He has removed them from the earth, and now judgement is about to be sent. Revelation is a book of prophecy and chapters 6 to 16 give the details of the judgements that are about to fall upon the earth. All this is contained in the scroll.

Now comes the challenge. A strong angel proclaims with a loud voice "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And the scripture adds "no one", not 'no man', "no one". No angel no archangel, no man on earth is able to open the scroll. No one comes forward. John weeps. He must have had a sense of the occasion. It is as though he were expressing the feelings of those brethren on earth to whom we have already referred, suffering under the hand of Satan and waiting the day when God would step forth in delivering power. He speaks personally: "I wept much." Another has remarked "without tears the Revelation was not written, neither without tears can it be understood".

One of the elders sees his distress and comes forward with words of comfort. "Weep not. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, who is he? Well, of course, we all know that it is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Jacob, before he died, prophesied that Judah is a lion's whelp and added "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah nor a law giver from between his feet".

And then as John continues to behold the scene the Lord Himself appears. But not as a lion. No! As a lamb and moreover, as a lamb that had been slain. Two thousand years after His death the marks of Calvary are still upon His blessed person. And here He is standing in the midst of that vast throng. No longer sitting upon the throne, upon His Father's throne as is recorded in the chapter 3. Why? Surely because the time of judgement is about to take place. As we read in John 5:22, the Lord Himself said, "All judgement has been committed to the Son." As the lion he exercises his power by crushing all opposition prior to the establishing of His kingdom. So the Elder who comforts the weeping John, reminds him that he is the root of David. Soon He will take His throne. But it is as the Lamb that He responds to the challenge. He is the only one who is able to respond. He is the only one who is morally competent to do so. As the Lamb by His death upon the Cross He overcame sin and death and Satan and secured an eternal redemption for all who will receive Him. Whilst that victory over Satan was achieved at Calvary, it was not then that Satan was taken out of circulation. Still he is permitted to work havoc in this world, to go about his business of luring souls away from God to a lost eternity.

But now the time has come when he is going to be taken and imprisoned for a thousand years and then ultimately condemned to the lake of fire. The Lamb has seven horns, symbolic of his strength. And he has seven eyes, which would indicate perception and discernment. They are the seven spirits of God and you can read about them in Isaiah 11:2. So the Lamb steps forth and takes the scroll from off the hand of the one who sits upon the throne.

Picture this scene. A glorious throne. God in all the greatness of His being. The Lord God Almighty sits upon it. All the hosts of Heaven are gathered around Him. All the archangels. The angels. The cherubims depicted by the living creatures. All the redeemed of past, present and the representatives of those yet future. And the Lamb. Still as one freshly slain. For that I understand it is the meaning of the term. But now about to be the administrator of judgement.

What a combination of glories are comprehended in the one who takes the scroll. Glory of deity. This one is none other than the Son of God. That glory which was ever His is that which He had before the world was, but He is to a man and there is the glory of manhood. We remember John's own words in his gospel "We beheld His glory full of grace and truth." The glory of power, the glory of wisdom, the glory of royalty and many other glories too numerous to mention. This is the one who responds to this challenge of opening the scroll.

This great act is described in scripture in very few words. "He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne." One has written describing this act as "simple and majestic, without any pomp of words or any effort to decorate the scene". And another has said "how calm and sublime".

The thought that is brought before us in this act is that God's mind, God's purposes and counsels, are being revealed by Christ. And so it must be for if we divorce Christ in our seeking to understand the ways and the purposes of God, we are bound to remain in ignorance. Whether we are reading through a book such as the Revelation and seeking to understand prophecy or any other passage of scripture that is revealing to us the ways of God, such communications can only come to us through Christ alone. Through Him all blessings flow.

Immediately the scroll is delivered up the whole of Heaven breaks forth in an acclamation of praise and worship. A new song is raised. The twenty four Elders lift up their voices in a new song. A song to the Lamb declaring his

worthiness, the theme of which is that of redemption. "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open its seals because thou hast been slain and hast redeemed to God by thy blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

If this is a new song we might well ask "What is the old song?" I believe that it is found in Job 38:7. In that chapter God, Jehovah, is reminding Job of his great work of creation on which occasion "the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy". What a stupendous work the work of creation was. All that God brought into being by that work of power. We can only see a minute part of it. Well may these heavenly beings of that time raise their voices in a song of praise to God. But here another work is the subject of the new song. The work of redemption, a work of even vaster magnitude than the work of creation itself. And here the angels too join in. In verse 12 they are saying with a loud voice "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing."

Note that it does not speak of the angels as singing the song. Properly speaking in scripture it is only the redeemed that can sing. Moses and all Israel sang on the shores of the Red Sea when God completed their redemption from under the heel of Pharaoh in bringing them out of Egypt. Angels know nothing personally of the work of redemption so scripture speaks of them as 'saying'.

A further lesson that I learned from this chapter is that our worship both to God and the Lamb should be conducted in a spirit of reverence. Both in chapter 4 and in chapter 5 the four and twenty Elders, representative of you and me, fall down before Him that sat upon the throne, and in chapter 5 they fall down before the Lamb. In chapter 4 they cast their crowns before the throne and their mode of address, whilst it is that of great intimacy, it is nevertheless also that of great reverence. "Thou art worthy." The angels are not able to take such a position. They have to speak in the third person. "Worthy is the lamb that was slain." In these days where the common philosophy is that every man is as good as his neighbour, I do verily believe that in our relationships with God, whether it be Father or Son, our deportment should be that of deepest reverence.

And so John hears every being in Heaven, upon earth and under the earth, all crying out with their ascription of worship and praise to Him that sits upon the throne and to the Lamb. What a chorus. And soon we shall have a part in it ourselves, unhindered by these bodies of humiliation that we still have. But, dear friends, God seeks worship from us now and it is our privilege to pre-empt that song which we shall sing then by our worship to the Father and Son now.

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