

## Revelation Chapter 5

In John chapter 19, the apostle presents us with the cross of the Lord Jesus. It is the culmination of His rejection by the world. Both Jews and Gentiles are present; both religious and political forces are represented.

But now in Revelation chapter 5, we come to the coronation of the Lord Jesus. It is coronation in heaven that is brought before us. In John chapter 12, we have a preview of His crowning day on earth. As the disciples follow Him into Jerusalem, they believe they are following the king to His coronation. They are expecting Him to take up His kingdom and rule, hence they cry, "Hosannah to the son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord". But it was but a preview of a future day. The Lord promised that one day it would be repeated. "Ye shall not see Me henceforth until ye shall say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord". One day He will re-enter Jerusalem and take up His crown. In Revelation chapter 5, however, it is His coronation in heaven. Let us look at some of the details:

The first thing that John mentions is a book or scroll in the right hand of Him that sat upon on the throne. The right hand is significant. It is used in scripture to suggest a place of power and privilege. On no less than five occasions in the New Testament, we read the words of Psalm 110:1 :

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

It is quoted in Matthew, Mark, Luke Acts, and Hebrews – a remarkable number of times. It emphasizes the place that God has reserved for His Son. The right hand here is the place of power.

In Genesis 48, we read of Joseph bringing his two sons to Jacob to receive his father's blessing. Manasseh, the elder of the two, is placed at Jacob's right hand and Ephraim is placed on the left. But Jacob crosses over his hands to give the greater blessing to Ephraim. It is a prophetic act, for Ephraim would become one of the largest of the tribes while Manasseh remained one of the smallest. Here the right hand is a place of blessing.

A similar thought is found in Luke 1:11:

And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

Zacharias is about to receive the promise of a son, hence Gabriel is at the right hand of the altar.

So, John sees this scroll in the right hand of God. The AV has "in" the right hand, but the preposition used is EPI, which means "upon". The scroll is being held up for all to see. The scroll is on offer to the assembled company.

John is standing before the throne of God. He is looking at the right hand of God. But does this not contradict with what John wrote in his gospel, chapter 1:18?

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

Some would take from this verse that we shall never see God in person, but only in the person of the Lord Jesus. To support this thought, other scriptures are quoted. For example, Colossians 1:15:

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

"Invisible" in this verse, however, carries a different meaning from how we would use it today. We use the word invisible to describe something which cannot be seen. But the word in Colossians 1:18 is simply the negative of the word "seen" ie it is something that is unseen. There is a difference between what is not seen and that which cannot be seen. Our verse is really saying that Christ is the image of the unseen God. It still leaves the door open for God to be seen.

But in John 4:24, we are told that God cannot be seen because He is a spirit: God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

This again is not conclusive. The fact that God is a spirit does not preclude Him from being seen. In Hebrews 1:14, we read of angels that they are spirits, yet the Bible abounds with angelic appearances, when angels were seen by men:

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

So there is nothing above which would convince me that we shall never see God. But John 1:18 is surely true. "No man hath seen God". But there is a qualifying statement added - "At any time". Could the verse be restricted to time ie to men in the flesh. What if men were beyond time - for example in heaven. Could they see God there?

Job certainly had aspirations of seeing God beyond the grave in his resurrection body.

Job 19:26-27 states this hope no less than three times in this section :

And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

As part of the sermon on the mount, the Lord pronounced the following blessing in Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

But does God have a form that we can see and recognize? Genesis 1:26 tells us that we have been made like God. We are like Him and He is like us :

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

God therefore has a human form, and certain verses reinforce this thought. In

Matthew 19:10, we are told by the Lord regarding the little ones who believe in Him, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of the Father in heaven. Then in Revelation chapter 4, John describes the One that sat upon the throne as being a jasper stone and a sardine stone. Then we come to our chapter, number 5, and John is drawing our attention to a scroll in God's right hand.

We have one more sighting of God in Daniel chapter 7:9

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

The ancient of days here is God and the Son of man who approaches the throne is the Lord Jesus.

So we have the hopes of Job, the promise of the Saviour, and the experience of those who have seen God. But John 1:18 remains true. No man has ever seen God while still in the flesh. Both Daniel and John saw God in visions ie they were out of time and in heaven. One day, in our resurrection bodies, we shall look upon the face of God.

Let us now come to the book upon the right hand. The word "book" is really a rolled up scroll. Can we suggest what this scroll means? Bearing in mind what follows in the rest of the chapter, I believe this scroll is the title deeds of earth. We see an example of such a book in Jeremiah 32:12 :

And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison.

It was a remarkable time for Jeremiah to be buying a piece of land. The city was under siege by the king of Babylon. Jeremiah was prophesying that the city would soon fall. Because of his prophecy, the prophet finds himself in prison. So, as a prisoner in a doomed city, Jeremiah purchases a field. It was an act of faith, demonstrating the fact that despite his personal circumstances and the city's fate, the city would have a future.

God still has a future for Israel. Though scattered for most of the past 2000 years, God has not forgotten His promise. So the title deeds of not only Israel but the whole world are held up to view. The scroll is written within and on the backside. It perhaps suggests that there is no place for any additions to the scroll. The word of God is secure. The scroll is also sealed with seven seals. The loosing of these seals marks the beginning of the outpouring of the judgment of God upon the whole earth. God will purge His kingdom to make it fit for the King who is coming.

In verse number 2, we hear the challenge offered. It is given by a strong angel with a loud voice. "Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof"? The challenge is not, "Who would like to open the book?", but who is worthy? Lucifer would love to be able to take the title deeds of earth. Away back in Isaiah 14, he had said in his heart, "I will be like the Most High". He wanted to be like God. In Matthew 4, he offers the Lord upon the mountain top, the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. But they were not his to

give. But here Satan knows he is not worthy. Many men in history have tried to conquer the world by force – men like Alexander the Great, and in more recent times, Napoleon and Hitler. They failed in their lifetime, but they are not worthy.

The challenge of the angel is met with silence and John wept much because no one was found worthy. John is still weeping when one of the 24 elders speaks to him:

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

Let's ask another question first. Who are these 24 elders that we read of in chapters 4 and 5 of the book, and who are the 4 beasts. We are happy enough to interpret the beasts as being angelic beings. They are sometimes referred to as the "living creatures". This is a rather clumsy way to interpret the thought of 4 animals, who are not wild beasts like the two beasts of chapter 13 of Revelation, but rather 4 domesticated animals like sheep or goats. The fact that there are 4 beasts suggest that they have a universal role. They belong to the inner court of heaven. One beast is like a lion suggesting strength, one is like a calf suggesting service, the third is like a man, suggesting intelligence, and the fourth is like an eagle, suggesting swiftness. (See Revelation chapter 4:7).

The 24 elders we are often told are a figure of the church. We are also told in chapter 4 that John himself is a picture of the church being caught up into heaven. We therefore have a situation in chapter 5:5 when one of the elders speaks to John ie the church is speaking to itself. We are in danger of having too many metaphors!!

Are there any other difficulties in our interpreting the 24 elders to be the church? In chapter 4:10 we read this of the elders:

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

It is Paul who tells us that if we suffer with the Lord Jesus now, we shall reign with Him in the future. But does not the casting down of the crowns suggest rather an abdication of power back to God. That is doubt number 1.

Again in chapter 4, verses 9 and 10, we read of worship beginning with the 4 beasts and spreading out to the 24 elders. It tells us that the beasts or angels are nearer to the throne of God than the elders. This contradicts what Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 1:4. There we learn that God has chosen us to be holy and without blame before Him in love. "Before Him" means literally "in the immediate presence of" or "before His face". This is a stronger expression than that used by Gabriel in Luke chapter 1 whose boast it was that he stood in the presence of God. We are nearer to God than angels. How then can these 4 beasts be nearer to the throne than the 24 elders if the elders here represent the church?

Last of all, we come to the new song of the beasts and elders in verses 8 and 9. The AV says "redeemed us to God but JND omits the pronoun "us" in his

translation. Also in verse 9, Mr Darby writes not "made us unto our God" but "made them". Also in verse 9, it should read "they" shall reign on the earth. The beasts and elders are not singing about themselves but of others who have been redeemed and who are to reign on earth. "On" is EPI which means upon earth. The church is to reign with Christ over the earth, not upon the earth.

So, if the elders are not the church, who else can they be? I believe that they too are angelic beings, part of the court of heaven. In chapter 4 they are right to abdicate their power, for God is going to hand over all power to His Son. And being angels, they are not redeemed but can sing of others who have been. But why are there 24 elders? In I Chronicles 24, 25, and 26 David appointed 24 courses of the priests, 24 courses of the musicians, 24 courses of the porters, and 24 captains of the temple guard. Why was this? It was for the government of the house of God. These 24 elders then are part of the inner cabinet of the government of God.

Let's return again to verse 5 of our chapter :

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

We are now introduced to the Lord Jesus, described here as the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David. In Genesis 49:9-10, the promise of the sceptre is given by Jacob to his son Judah.

Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

Judah was to be the royal tribe, the line of David. The Lord is here described as the root of David ie David's Lord. Later in Revelation 22:16, He will be described as the root and offspring of David ie as David's Lord and David's son. But in chapter 5, He is David's Lord only, thus enhancing His position. Back in Genesis 49, Jacob described his son Judah as a lion's whelp, a lion's cub. But the Lord is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He has full strength and majesty invested in Him.

This is the Lord's legal entitlement to the title deeds of earth. We learn from the gospels that He has two claims to the throne of David. Matthew gives us His genealogy through Joseph, going back to David via Solomon. Luke, on the other hand, traces His lineage back through Mary, to David via another son Nathan.

But when the Lord turns to see the lion, he sees rather a lamb as it had been slain. We now have the Lord's moral right to the title deeds. They are His not only because of who He is, but also because of what He has done. He has purchased the world by His own blood. The Lord has both a legal and a moral right to the throne.

In Genesis, we read of the rivalry between Esau and Jacob for the birthright and blessing of Isaac. Esau being the elder twin had the legal right but he had no moral right. The New Testament speaks of him as "that profane person".

Jacob, on the other hand, had no legal right but had the moral right. God had promised him the blessing. "The elder shall serve the younger". All he had to do was to sit back and wait for God to fulfill His promise, but instead Jacob and his mother got it by deceit.

But in Revelation 5, the Lord is the Lion and the Lamb – He has both legal and moral claims to the title deeds of earth.

John gives us a brief description of the Lamb. He has seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. The number seven speaks of perfection. Horns would speak of power, as we learn later in connection with the horns of the first beast of Revelation chapter 13. The Lamb is the omnipotent One. He displayed that omnipotence when He was here on earth, by the many miracles that He performed. In John's gospel in particular, He often displayed His omniscience – see His knowledge of Nathaniel, of the woman by the well, of the man by the pool of Bethesda etc. But after His coronation, the whole world will become conscious of who He is as He makes known His omnipotence and His omniscience.

When the Lord steps forward to take the book, the beasts and elders sing a new song of praise. Each of them has a harp as they lead the universe of God in praise to God and the Lamb.

The beasts and the elders also have vials full of odours which are the prayers of saints. It is lovely to know that not only are our prayers stored in heaven but that our prayers are the sweet perfume of heaven. It reminds of that house in Bethany when Mary took that ointment and anointed the Lord's feet. John adds the comment, the whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment. The whole company had the benefit of the fragrance. Well heaven also enjoys the fragrance of the prayers of saints. The word used for odours in Revelation chapter 5 is the same word used for incense in Luke chapter 1 when Zacharias came to offer incense in the temple.

We have already considered the words of the song. They sing not of their own redemption but rather the song of the redeemed. The refrain is taken up by the millions of angels in verses 11 and 12, then by all of humanity in the last two verses. The praise is taken up by those in heaven, those on earth, those in the sea, and even those under the earth. It is a universal song – even those in hell join in to proclaim His worth. It is the fulfillment of Philippians 2 :

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

How glad we are that we have bowed to Him today, in this age of grace. For us, His coronation will be a time of great joy. How tragic for those who know Him not today, but will be compelled to bow to Him then and confess that He is Lord