

Seven Secrets of the Apocalypse: War Hero

Scripture: Revelation 5:1-5

Hymns: 88, 246

Preached at Pagosa Springs, CO SDA Church March 13, 2021

INTRODUCTION

I have a friend who served in Vietnam. I wish he was here today to hear this message in person. There are many Vietnam veterans that live out here in this county. I've talked with some of them. I've listened to their stories. War is always a terrible endeavor. But it was particularly difficult for our Vietnam vets. The campaign itself was long - the longest in our history until Afghanistan surpassed it a few years ago. Not only was the war long, but it soon became clear to all that there was no real winning strategy. American forces were not permitted to go on the offensive into North Vietnam, for fear of drawing China into the conflict as had happened in Korea a decade before. This resulted in a prolonged stalemate. The NVA simply waited us out. Politics dictated the tactics of the war, making it essentially a losing fight. But perhaps the most difficult aspect of it all was the return home. Because of the social upheaval of the 1960s and early 1970s the veterans who returned home were not treated well. About 9 years ago my friend Charlie told us the story of his return home. He still had tears in his eyes. Often vets were met at airports by protestors carrying signs. They were spit on. They were called "baby-killers". Communist-sympathizing celebrities denounced them. (Not much has changed in 50 years, I guess) They were portrayed in films and television shows as psychotic, dangerous people. Whether you agree with war in general, or with that war in particular, it was a tragic way to greet men who had risked their lives and endured the horrors of war.

Now if there is anyone who understands how our Vietnam vets felt (and perhaps still feel) it is our Lord Jesus Christ. You remember how He was treated throughout His life but particularly at its close by the Jews and by the soldiers of Pilate. He received similar treatment when in the custody of Herod, and then came Calvary. The Hero of this great war that we call the Great Controversy who was risking His very existence to save the fallen world was mocked, spit upon, and ultimately crucified. But that was not the end of the story! Turn with me to Revelation 5:1-12, and let's read this entire chapter together. While you are navigating to the text, I should mention that this is part two of an ongoing series entitled "Seven Secrets of the Apocalypse". As I mentioned when I presented part one, I don't intend to give all these

messages directly in sequence, but I will be putting them together as a set with the possible intention of publishing them as a sharing book at some point. But let's read the passage:

Rev. 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.

Rev. 5:2 Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"

Rev. 5:3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.

Rev. 5:4 ¶ So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.

Rev. 5:5 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."

Rev. 5:8 ¶ 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.

Rev. 5:9 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,

Rev. 5:10 And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth."

Rev. 5:11 ¶ 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,

Rev. 5:12 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!"

Rev. 5:13 ¶ 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!"

[Rev. 5:14](#) ¶ Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

OBSERVATIONS

The first observation that I would propose here is that *the question, "who is worthy," has everything to do with righteousness*. This is especially true if you consider the larger context of the passage. If we go back to Revelation chapter 4, we see the clear allusions to that the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai - one of the most momentous of all the events of the Old Testament. The first thing we see in chapter 4 is that the prophet is told to "come up here." This is exactly what Moses did at Sinai - he went up to receive instruction from God. Then you have the lightning, thunder, voices, and fire. All of these were present at Sinai as well. You also have the sea of glass upon which a group of elders sits. This is reminiscent of the pavement of translucent blue sapphire stone of Exodus 24:9-11 on which the elders of Israel saw the pre-incarnate Christ and had a fellowship meal to celebrate the ratification of the covenant. And finally you have the four living creatures, the faces of which were found, according to ancient Jewish tradition, on the banners of the four leading tribes around the camp of Israel. So the focus in Revelation 4 is clearly on God as Creator and, by implication, as Lawgiver.

So with all this context, it is clear that the question of Revelation 5:2 is perfectly logical - who is worthy to open the scroll? And, as I asserted earlier, I will submit to you again now - another way to ask that question is this - who is righteous enough to open the scroll? Of course there is only one definition of righteousness in the Bible - one standard of measurement, and that is the character of God Himself as set forth in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. The question of who is worthy is an absolutely vital question to ask at this present time. I will affirm without hesitation that I have never lived at a time when people are more confused and bewildered about what righteousness is than they are right now. And I would also assert that the level of hypocritical, self-righteousness (the term they use now is "virtue signaling") is at record levels. In the midst of all this confusion, the Bible cuts through the fog to bring us face to face with this ultimate question - "Who is (really) worthy?"

The second thing we should see here is that *the answer to the question posed in the second verse provokes one of two responses*. The answer, according to verse 3 is: "And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it." Here we find the whole gamut of where we can find human beings. Let's start at the bottom and work our way up. There are people that are under the earth - this is a reference to the dead - an important reference, by the way as to where the dead are. There were millions of the dead that God could choose from, but not one of them was considered worthy to open the scroll. There are also, obviously, people who are on the earth - those who are alive at any given moment. None of those who were alive in John's day, even John himself - the disciple whom Jesus loved, who wrote that masterpiece of a gospel, was considered worthy to open the scroll. And, according to the Bible, there are also a few people in heaven. Enoch, for instance, is in heaven today; Moses, also is there. So is Elijah the prophet who was taken up in a whirlwind. There was also a group of people that ascended to heaven with Jesus when He ascended. Now all of these people were good people, but not one of them was good enough to open the scroll. We see here a reiteration of that great principle stated in Romans 3:23 - "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." You will agree with me that this is not a flattering picture. And right here, I say, we find one major reason why many people reject the Bible. Many agree with the ethical teaching of Christ. Many see heaven as something to be desired. But here's where the rub comes - its with texts like this - "There is none righteous, no, not one." Or, "There is none who does good, no, not one." And, "there is no fear of God before their eyes." These all come from the OT and are quoted in Romans 3. The natural man hates these verses for one simple reason - they do not flatter him. People just don't like it when their faults are pointed out. The Bible does a lot of that, and this is one significant reason why people hate it so much. But John's reaction to the news is not this reaction. His response is not one of anger, but of sadness. He wept much, not because his feelings were hurt, but rather because he was heartbroken over sin's destructive power. What will it be for you, friend? How will you respond to this declaration that apart from the grace of God mankind is a race of lost sinners? At this point of the message, each one of us has an opportunity to decide for ourselves which of these responses we will exhibit. How will you react? Anger, or heartbreak? Belligerence, or brokenness? This is the pivot point at which people either revile or repent. May God help us to do the latter, and shun the former!

But thankfully the passage doesn't end here, or there would be no sense in my preaching to you this morning. Indeed, there would be no good news to proclaim! But here we see a third

observation - and that is that *Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man has prevailed in the Great War against the devil and sin*. Through the words of the apostle we are invited into the throne room of heaven to behold the victory celebration of the ratification of the everlasting covenant. Note that this scene parallels the celebration of Exodus 24 where the Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel celebrated the ratification of the covenant in type and shadow. But here we see the celebration of the reality! By His death, Christ shed the blood that ratified the everlasting covenant promise of salvation by grace, received by faith. No wonder the angel said to John - "Weep not." Hallelujah for those words, "weep not!" These words remind us of the words of the angel to the shepherds on the plain of Bethlehem - "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10,11. Do not weep - no - instead do what? BEHOLD!! (Verse 5). Behold who? Behold the Hero of the Great Controversy! Behold the Lion of the Tribe of Judah! Why behold Him? Because, as verse 5 points out, He has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals. Now I will say more about the scroll in a moment, but let's delve into verse 6 and see how the war Hero is portrayed there. He is portrayed, not as a lion, but as a Lamb having been slain, yet He was alive. Note that He is portrayed as standing in the midst of the throne (indicating His position as God) and in the midst of the four living creatures (indicating His position as Archangel - the ruler of the angels) and in the midst of the elders (indicating His position as the corporate representative of humanity). He has seven horns (indicating complete power) and seven eyes, which are defined as the seven-fold Spirit of God - symbolized in the sanctuary service by the seven branched candlestick. The horns and the eyes remind us of His words to His disciples before His ascension - the words of the Great Commission - "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." Matthew 28:18, 19a. His battle on earth was won! Now the victory must be proclaimed, and demonstrated by His disciples.

But we must not finish before we discuss the significance of the handoff of the scroll. There is evidence that Israelite kings in the OT were to make a copy of the law of Moses upon their accession to the throne. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 spells this out clearly. The implication is that when they became king that they would be given the Law of Moses to copy. In 2 Kings 11:12 we see an explicit reference to this in the crowning of little Joash. **2Kings 11:12** And he brought out the king's son, put the crown on him, and gave *him* the Testimony; they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, "Long live the king!"

(2 Kings 11:12 NKJV) So what did it mean when the Lamb was handed the scroll in Revelation 5? It meant that the world, over which Satan had claimed to be entitled to exercise sovereignty was to be given back into the hands of the Son of God - fully and completely. Christ, the slain Lamb was formally recognized then and there to be the rightful ruler of earth, and would exercise His co-regency with the Father as the God-man. It meant that Christ would open the seals of the scroll, that He would become the arbiter of the history of the world post-Calvary, and that history would culminate exactly as He predicted it would - in the ultimate eradication of sin.

Note that when this happens it is hallelujah time in heaven! Note the verses that follow!!

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And to open its seals;
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And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

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"Blessing and honor and glory and power
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Rev. 5:14 ¶ Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

APPEAL

Friends, this great Hero of the Great Controversy is about to return. The question you must answer is this: How will you greet Him? There are two possible ways. Some, because they have spent so much time listening and watching enemy propaganda, will seek to hide their faces from Him. They will call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them so that they don't have to see Him face to face. They view Him as a villain rather than the Hero that He is. If they could, they would carry out the desires of their father, the devil, and tear Him from His throne so that they might rule the universe themselves, like the tyrants that they are. These will be destroyed, not because God hates them, but rather because they would rather die than live forever in the glorious liberty of the sons of God. They hate the Hero that died so that men could be free from sin and its consequences. They hate the idea of freedom itself, because their whole desire is to control and oppress others. Friend, please, do not let yourself be among these people. No- instead, let your lot be cast with the minority of earth's population who welcome our great Hero back to the world that is rightfully His! Welcome Him home to the world where He will dwell with us for eternity! Welcome home the One who has put down the devil's insurgency and by so doing has guaranteed us the freedom to choose. May God help us to behold Him every day, and every moment - our Hero who has made the ultimate sacrifice for us.