

Revelation 5.1–6

The Lion and the Lamb

Amington

Sunday 24 May 2020

Revelation: Names of Jesus [4]

Judgement

Revelation 4 and 5 describe one of my favourite scenes in the Bible. I recommend reading those two chapters together – it doesn't take long. They give us a glimpse of God's heavenly throne-room, and the worship that goes on there forever. You'll recognise the words from hymns and songs that we sing – inspired by these chapters.

At the start of chapter 5, John sees God – **him who sat on the throne** (1) – with a **scroll** in his **right hand** (the hand of power and authority). It is the scroll of God's judgement.

Now, the word 'judgement' has a bit of a bad press these days. Being 'judgemental' is one of the worst things we can be accused of. Here, this is *justice*, putting right all the wrongs, sorting out all the mess, dividing good from bad – God's final word on creation.

What a moment that will be – the most momentous moment!

No-one

But there's a problem – the scroll is sealed shut and needs opening. **'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?'** asks a **mighty angel** (2).

Now, if we needed to open a new supermarket, who would be *worthy* enough to do that? Perhaps a local councillor?

What about a new school – we're going up in the world a bit here, so maybe the local MP, or if it's a church school, the local bishop.

But who is worthy to open a *hospital*? Now we're really climbing the social ladder – this is where we hit secretaries of state, and maybe even royalty.

But **'who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?'** No-one. That's right: no-one.

In the middle of this scene of praise and worship there is an awkward silence – broken only by the sound of John weeping: he says he **wept and wept** – why? – **because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside** (4). No human being, no angel – not even the archangel Gabriel himself. No-one.

Except, one.

Lion

An elder tells John:

‘Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.’

Revelation 5.5 (NIV)

The Lion of Judah – the description goes right back to the origins of God’s people. Jacob, the father of twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel, blessed his sons before he died. He said this of his son Judah:

‘Judah... your brothers will praise you... Judah is like a lion... Judah will hold the royal sceptre, and his descendants will always rule... Nations will bow in obedience before him.’

Genesis 49.8-10 (GNB)

The Lion of Judah is a symbol of rule, power, authority and might. I see Aslan from the film adaptations of *The Chronicles of Narnia*: huge, powerful, a golden-brown mane, rippling muscles, and waving fur. I imagine that’s what John expected to see as he looked round for the Lion of Judah.

Lamb

But as he looks, he sees – a *lamb*. And not just any lamb: **a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain** (6). You can't get much more *not* a lion, than a lamb: small, weak, barely able to walk or even bleat – they're pathetic. Tasty, but pathetic.

The symbol of a Lamb goes back *even further* in the Bible than the Lion of Judah, right back even to Cain and Abel, who gave God the best parts of the first lamb born to one of his sheep (Genesis 4.4). A lamb saves Isaac on Mount Moriah. The blood of lambs saves the Israelites on the night of the Passover.

So we have two pictures of Jesus, steeped in history and meaning. And it's tempting to see them as equal. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that Jesus is the all-conquering Lion of Judah, mighty King of kings and Lord of lords, strong and powerful. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that Jesus is the gentle and loving Saviour who gave himself up for us.

It's tempting to see those two pictures as equal – two sides of a coin – but I'm not sure they are.

How many times do you think Jesus is called the 'Lion of Judah' in Revelation? Once. Here, in chapter 5 verse 5.

How many times do you think Jesus is called the 'Lamb' in Revelation? Over *thirty* times – thirty-six I make it!

That's quite a crude argument, but how's this – remember the question at the start of chapter 5? **'Who is worthy?'** The answer is Jesus – but let's see *why* he is worthy:

'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, *because you were slain.* (9)

'Worthy is the Lamb, *who was slain.* (12)

'To him who sits on the throne and to the *Lamb* be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!' (13)

Jesus is worthy, not because he is an all-conquering mighty Lion, *but because he gave himself up as a lamb to the slaughter.*

Jesus *is* mighty – don't get me wrong, there are plenty of pictures of Jesus, strong and majestic, all-conquering and powerful. But the scandal is that God defeated his and our enemies by becoming *weak*. Jesus the Lamb won the victory in *weakness*. He is worthy *because he was slain.*

Think of the cross – the moment of Jesus’ glory was a moment of great weakness and shame, as he hung there, naked, taunted by the passers-by; **‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘But he can’t save himself’** (Matthew 27.42, NIV).

Weakness

This is precisely John’s point. He was writing to a church that felt *weak*. They were being persecuted, hunted down, killed and tortured for their faith. They felt – and in fact they *were* – weak.

But one of the things Jesus shows us, one of the most precious truths of the gospel, is that *God works in and through weakness*. He doesn’t simply brush it aside, he takes it, uses it, fills it, moulds it. God said to Paul, **‘My grace is sufficient for you – why? – for my power is made perfect in weakness’** (2 Corinthians 12.9, NIV).

Do you feel weak? Good! You are – realising that is the first step in coming to Jesus to let him work in and through us.

**The church is the army of the weak,
made strong by the blood of the Lamb.**

Are you ready to fight – in all your weakness – and to stand firm with Jesus, who *alone* is worthy and who *alone* has won the victory?

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, you are the Lamb,

You alone are worthy because you were slain,

And with your blood you purchase for God

Persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God

Jesus help us, in all our weakness, to follow you together,

Every day, and in every way.

Amen.