

Tragedy and Triumph

Revelation 5

The Bible says that in heaven, God will wipe every tear away, and John the apostle, while viewing the throne room in heaven, is about to weep profusely. That's because a cataclysmic tragedy is presented to him.

*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. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And **no one** in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.*

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

As John is watching, a scroll is in God's possession. What could possibly be in this scroll that's so confidential and so important? No one in the created order, seen or unseen, can open it or even look upon it. As he describes it, there are seven seals upon it and writing both inside and on the outside of it.

Some have suggested that this is the title deed to planet earth and initially that sounds good, but there's a problem with that – the earth is already the Lord's forever. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell

therein." For this reason, I think there's a better explanation.

In the book of Leviticus 25:25 – 31, we find a very interesting law laid down by God pertaining to redemption. In short, if someone loses possession of his land, he can redeem it from the new owner at the appropriate price. If he that lost the property is too poor to redeem it, he has to wait till the year of Jubilee at which time it will once again become his possession. However, there's a different rule for houses in walled cities. If someone loses possession of this type of property (i.e. man made) and cannot redeem it within the allotted time (one year) because of poverty or indebtedness, that property forever becomes the property of the new owner. It can never be redeemed again.

All that is to say that the land, the earth, is redeemable, but that which pertains to man can only be redeemed by the appropriate price within the specified time.

Back in the garden of Eden, mankind 'sold' his property to Satan. In willful rebellion against God, he effectively sold his soul and became the servant of sin. From that point, Satan had certain property rights and only a very specific price and time of redemption could apply to that property. The price of redemption was one sinless man, an Adam for an Adam, so to speak. The time limit or 'deadline' on the redemption was seemingly set by God in Daniel chapter nine. For more on this, see our lesson

entitled, "This Your Day" in which we showed that the period concluded on the Friday following the exact day prophesied that He would enter Jerusalem, hailed as the King, the Son of David.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, one of the temptations included this man made property. In Luke's account, *The devil led Him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to Him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."* (Luke 4:5-7) Jesus did not contest this point, He simply refused to worship him.

The next concept we should consider pertaining to the heavenly scroll is that of inheritance. God has an inheritance to pass along. In Deut 4, Moses says to the people of Israel, *But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are.* And in Deut 9, Moses speaking to God says, *But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm.* That is, God's people are His inheritance.

Both property documents (as in Jeremiah 25) and inheritances were typically sealed, and if they became encumbered by some debt or obligation, the price to satisfy that debt was often written on the outside.

Therefore, I submit that this scroll in the hand of God represents the encumbered inheritance of God's people (the Hebrews) and all the kingdoms of man whom God would redeem from Satan for the price of one sinless man. Of course John wept bitterly, for when he learned that no one was found worthy to take and open the scroll, it meant that this inheritance would forever become the property of Satan – eternally unredeemable.

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 lose its seven seals." The mighty Lion of Judah was found worthy – the resurrected, glorified Son of God, Jesus Christ. He paid the debt we all owed/owe. It's wholly a past tense situation for the honest believer. For everyone else, the debt, though paid by Christ, is as yet fully burdensome because of disbelief.

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. When John heard of a mighty Lion, he surely did not expect to see a mutilated Lamb. It would seem that His position -- that is, the Lamb's -- as being in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures, places Him squarely in the same location as Father God and, of course, this makes sense

for He is God the Son. But, He also has seven horns and seven eyes -- which signify omnipotence and omniscience -- that are the seven Spirits of God or the manifestation (to every tribe, tongue and nation) of the Holy Spirit to each of the seven churches. So there on the throne, in effect, you have God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit in perfect unity.

Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. You know, He didn't have to take that scroll. He was found worthy to do so, but He didn't have to do it. After all, what it represents is a corrupted, rebellious group. Remember, as we covered in our last lesson, the church, at this point, is already in heaven – because of that, this scroll represents the encumbered inheritance of those who have as yet rejected salvation by grace, who stubbornly hold on to their spiritual indebtedness.

But He took the scroll because He is committed to His people and though it will take a hellish tribulation to bring them all to Him, as lost sheep to their Shepherd, He will do it.

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. So we have 28 instances of prayer and worship surrounding the Lamb. Interestingly enough the curtains of the tabernacle which

surrounded the myriad types and symbols of Jesus including the altar of incense, the altar of sacrifice and the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies were each 28 cubits long – perhaps another foreshadow of the heavenly realm. By the way, the saints here are not of Roman Catholic origin but rather those who are saved by faith and set apart for God. In the OT prophecy, they represent Hebrew believers like Daniel or father Abraham. In the NT, the word can also refer to gentile believers.

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,

And have made us kings and priests to our God;

And we shall reign on the earth.”

It's interesting that this tribute is called “a new song”. Seven times, the scriptures tell us to sing or be filled with a new song. Here in heaven, this continues. The redeemed church sings this new song, and later in chapter fourteen, the 144,000 redeemed of Israel sing their own new song. Now, the lyrics are as ageless as God's plan of redemption for Jesus is the Lamb who was slain from before the foundations of the earth. Nevertheless, it's a new song; this word for new means fresh, and it is indeed fresh praise

that comes forth from the hearts of the redeemed. In heaven, this sense of His worthiness is ever fresh and alive. The message doesn't change, it is the sense of its truth and profundity that are ever new.

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, 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!”

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't want to be a ‘worship nerd’ in heaven. I don't want to be attributing these awesome things to Jesus only because everyone else is. It's not at all that I have any doubt as to His worthiness, I just want to be as sincere as possible. For that reason, I've spent considerable time meditating on this passage and affirming in my own heart why He is worthy of each thing. (See: Power to the Lord, Wisdom's Cry, Wising Up, Muchness, Priceless Love, Pitch Black and His Desire, Our Delight at www.heavenlyminded.com)

Notice how many creatures are around the throne! Angels, elders, and the living ones – more than 100,000,000. The implication is that it's an innumerable host.

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!”

At this point, every other created being chimes in, and together they all praise both Father God and the Lamb.

And so, what we can look forward to is that the curse upon creation will be removed – in Christ. As Paul wrote of Father God, ...*having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.* (Eph 1:9,10) Man redeemed, creation restored, reconciliation universal – all in Jesus Christ. *For it pleased the Father that in Him **all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*** (Col 1:19,20)

Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever. These four apparently have awesome authority for in confirming the desire of all creation toward the One on the throne and toward the Lamb, they

say, "So be it!" and with this the first act, so to speak, in the throne room of heaven concludes. As for this praise, the audience is not the host of creation but the One. 'So be it', is in effect, His acceptance. In worshipful appreciation, those who represent all redeemed believers bow before Him. What a glorious, glorious triumph!