

## A new song

Take a few moments to read Revelation 5:9-11.

It speaks of Jesus who is able to execute God's plan. It also speaks of his people who he has purchased through a new Exodus (see Psalm 74:2.) Jesus is a new Moses but this time the whole world is being led out of slavery. Jesus has formed a new people from every place and every culture and he is calling them to bring about his kingdom.

Take a moment to look at the last part of verse 10 - did you realise when you believed in Jesus that you were being called to that? Remember Revelation 1:5-6. Priests create the link between humans and God; the kingdom is about advancing his rule.

Two more loud speeches follow, one from heaven and one from the whole of God's creation, including the earth. The first says that the Lamb is worthy of everything, which is a call to everyone who reads. The second brings God and Jesus together. They deserve - and will get - everything.

God is calling his people to see through the struggles to the ultimate victory. Let's join in the 'amen' ('yes' or 'agreed') in verse 14.

### The centre of history

God is going to work. What will happen when the seals are broken? See you next time!

## Revelation 4 & 5: the scroll

5th February 2023



Seven churches, representing the church as a whole, have been told that they can be victorious. The word, which is used in each of the seven letters can be translated as 'overcomer' or 'triumphant.' Sounds good.

But these churches faced severe problems. Persecution was looming. Some faced pressures from others who claimed to represent God. Some were being pressed into immoral lifestyles. Some were trying hard but they were poor and weak. Some were not doing as well as they thought they were. We are told for the second time that major events were about to take place. God has a plan and the church, for all its issues, is key to it.

The plan is depicted in a scroll, sealed with seven seals, the number seven showing that the plan is completely sealed. John weeps because no one could open the scroll, which means that no one, especially no member of any of the seven churches, is able to implement God's plan. Yet chapter five tells us that the prayers of God's people are being held close to the throne of God - when the seals are broken the harps will play their beautiful music and the prayers will be answered.

## God on the throne - chapter four

For the second time John is 'in the spirit' and he sees a vision of God. As usual in the Bible, John makes no attempt to describe God; instead he describes everything around God.

I suggest that you read the chapter right through and let it dazzle you and draw you into the heavenly worship. Don't try at first to make sense of it all; you can take far too long wondering how a rainbow can look like an emerald.

Here a few thoughts:

- \* The rainbow symbolises hope and God's promise not to flood the earth again, from the story of Noah.
- \* The 24 elders may refer to the number of attendants who accompanied Roman Emperors. John wants his readers to know who is really on the throne.
- \* Lightning, rumbling and peals of thunder take us back to the Exodus under Moses Exodus 19:16 / Psalm 77:18.
- \* The seven spirits/breaths of God are back. God is going to breathe on these churches.
- \* The four living creatures with their 'holy holy holy' chant take us back to the call of Isaiah in Isaiah 6. I invite you to compare these two passages.
- \* The living creatures stress that God is always active in the world, past present and future. (compare 1:4 and 4:8)
- \* The chapter finishes by saying that God created everything and everything is created for him. He is worthy of glory, honour and power. That's what the seven churches need to know. They may be struggling, but the future lies with God. The 24 elders will bow down before him. Our task is to serve him now.

## The Lamb - chapter five

John finds himself weeping uncontrollably, because there is no one fit (worthy) to action God's plan. The seven seals suggest that the bar is set very high, so high that no angel or human can reach it.

You may not be surprised to hear that this is the point to bring Jesus centre stage. He is the Lion of Judah. - see Jacob's blessing on his son Judah in Genesis 49:8-12. He is the root of David - see Isaiah 11, especially verse 10 with its amazing promise. He is the conqueror - remember all the promises at the end of the seven letters where the same word is used.

But John does not see a lion; he sees a lamb which bears the marks of slaughter. It is an astonishing moment reminding us that the risen Jesus showed his friends the marks in his friends and side. It points back to the cross as they way Jesus triumphed. It points to Isaiah 53. Remember Revelation 1.5. This victory does not come as we might expect.

The Lamb still bears the scars, but it also speaks of Jesus in his resurrection glory. He is before the throne of God. He has seven horns, symbolising complete strength. He has seven eyes, which speak of the seven breaths of God going out not just to the seven churches but to the whole earth.

Here is the one who can action God's plan and through him the church can conquer.