

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The Village Church of Rancho Santa Fe

Winter 2010 – *La Costa Glen, Women's Fellowship, Thursday Morning Men's Study*

Lesson Three – January 19, 20, 21

Revelation 4:1 – 5:14

Leader: The Rev. Dr. Jack W. Bacaⁱ

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1. Chapter 4 – Beginning of new major section – from earth to heaven
2. Synopsis of 4:1 – 18:24
 - a. Initial vision of glory & power of God the Creator & Redeemer
 - b. Portrayal of eschatological woes that (in apocalyptic thought) must be prelude to victorious establishment of God's Kingdom at the End
3. Structure
 - a. Portrayal of judgment on the evil world
 - b. Punctuated by portrayal of God's (and Christians') victory
4. Message
 - a. Christ stands at the end of history (things will turn out just fine)
 - b. Christ also stands in the midst of history (you can be just fine now)
5. Timing
 - a. Chapters 1-3: what "is now"
 - b. Chapter 4:1 and following: what is in immediate future
 - c. Note: there is no such thing as "rapture" – word does not occur in Revelation
 - d. Revelation is not about timing, it is about Who is in control of time!

DETAILED NOTES

1. Chapter 4:1-6a
 - a. General Message – God is God!
 - b. Opening Scene – heavenly glory of God & Lamb
 - c. *Before* hearing of catastrophes to come, John assures us that the God who is also the Lamb is in complete control (no worries)
 - d. Throne – 3 of 4 times word occurs in NT is in Revelation
 - e. Background – Ezekiel 1:4-28
 - f. "Vision" here is literary expression of prophetic truth, not a literal reporting of something John "saw"
 - g. Key point: John tells us not so much *what* the future will be but *who* is in control of the future
 - h. Contrast – the "throne" of Roman Empire

- i. Worthy art thou & Lord and God – terms used of Emperor
 - i. Images
 - i. Lightening & Thunder – God’s appearance at Sinai – Message is that *God is Here*
 - ii. The Book – Scroll of Law, Book of Prophets, Book of Life, Wills – Message is that *We are talking about God’s will*
 - iii. The Seals – personal imprint made by signet ring in wax or clay
 - iv. The Seven Spirits of God – Fullness of God’s presence & power
 - v. The Sea – chaos of sea at creation, Red Sea – Message is that “evil” sea is now *calm and glassy*
 - vi. The Rainbow – Noah & Flood – Message is that *God both judges and gives new covenant of love*
 - vii. The Living Creatures – All aspects of created life
 - viii. Other Thrones
 - 1. Christ “shares” the throne
 - 2. 24 Elders/Thrones – People of God (in heaven & earth) – 12 Tribes and 12 Apostles
2. Chapter 4:6b-11
- a. General Message – God is Creator of All and Redeems His Creation
 - b. Four Creatures – traditional cherubim from OT, Mesopotamian & Canaanite mythology
 - c. Cherubim – guardians of the Throne of God
 - d. Images:
 - i. Man – humanity
 - ii. Eagle – chief of all birds
 - iii. Ox – chief of all domestic animals
 - iv. Lion – chief of all wild animals
 - e. Song:
 - i. From Greek drama, gives clue to ultimate message
 - ii. Hymn to God the Creator who intended the Creation to be
 - iii. Message: not Gnosticism or Dualism, which held that Creation is bad or less, but affirmation of *this world*
 - iv. Message: gospel is not only about *next* or *spiritual* world, but also and equally so about *this world*
3. Chapter 5:1-7
- a. General Message – There is Someone who knows & controls the future (and he is on our side!)
 - b. Closed scroll – a big problem, in that no one can know or trust the future
 - c. The need – who can open the scroll?
 - d. The Great Lion of God
 - i. Root of David – (Isaiah 11)

- ii. Hope of a new King
 - iii. Lion – a symbol of the Messiah
 - iv. Lion – the one who will come in power to vindicate the helpless lambs who have been defeated by the evil empires of the world
 - e. Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)
 - i. MAJOR image shift – the Lion is...the Lamb!
 - ii. Interpretative Possibilities
 1. Jesus is first the Lamb (invitation to love Jesus), then the Lion (if you don't love, then Jesus becomes judging Lion) – not what Revelation says!
 2. Jesus is Lamb to Believers, Lion to Unbelievers – wrong again!
 3. Jesus is Lamb who is really just the Lion (a ram or warrior sheep) – wrong again!
 4. Jesus is the Lion who is really the Lamb – what Revelation does say
 - a. Greek for “lamb” here is weak, small, “powerless”
 - b. Lamb – 7 horns (power) & 7 eyes (wisdom)
 - c. Lamb – the one who *conquers!* (also translated as overcome, prevail, win, triumph)
 - d. Conquering is Dying – like the Lamb died
 - i. Dying – and being raised again
 - ii. Dying – and being “acquitted” in God's court (as opposed to convicted in Roman court)
 - f. This Lamb/Lion is worthy to open the Scroll – to know and determine the future
4. Chapter 5:8-14
 - a. General Message – Universal Victory and Praise – God/Christ Reigns!
 - b. Everything celebrates God as Creator and Redeemer
 - c. All of God's Creation does and will sing his praise
 - d. “Ultimate Past” – God created
 - e. “Ultimate Future” – God recreates
 - f. All else that follows in Revelation *must* be seen in context of this scene of God's design for ultimate good of all his creation

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. John takes us into his vision of God and Christ in heavenly glory. What image of God and Christ is most compelling to you?
2. “Vision” is not just about pictures, but also about goals, desires, plans, dreams. How does John's vision work in this way for Christians then and Christians now (like you)?
3. If John's purpose is to introduce us not so much to *what* will happen as *who* is in control of what will happen, how does that inform your daily life with Christ going forward?
4. John uses many ancient and “pre-scientific” images to describe what cannot be described. How would you—in modern terms—describe God and Christ?

5. John proclaims that God intends to redeem *this* world in which we live, not just some other world (the afterlife). How does that conviction inform the way you live today?
6. John shows the great Lion of God to be the Lamb of God, in effect describing God's way of conquering through sacrificial love. How does sacrificial love operate in your life, even in the most difficult and trying of circumstances?
7. The concluding scene of this section takes us into total worship of God & Christ, affirming that all of creation (past, present, future) will serve God's purpose of good. How might this "faith-knowledge" speak to ancient and modern situations of great suffering and pain?

i Primary Sources: Earl Palmer, *Communicator's Commentary*, and M. Eugene Boring, *Interpretation Commentary*