

Unshakable

Week 4: The Lamb

Revelation 5

Indy Mini and running around the track. 2.5 miles, banks, etc.

- Me: 23 minutes at a cool 6.5mph. I am not “built for speed!”
- Indy Car (Show Image): 39 seconds at over 230mph
 - Everything about this car is built for power and speed.
 - Wouldn’t look at a car like this and think lazy Sunday afternoon drive. This is what power and performance looks like! Not surprising it goes so fast.
- What *would* be surprising is if you turned on the Indy 500 next Sunday and saw this...(Geo Tracker Image)!
 - Shout out to anyone still rocking a Geo Tracker, but it’s not built for speed!
 - This is NOT what power looks like.

We know power when we see it. And John is writing this letter of Revelation to people who knew what power looked like. They saw it all around them in the Roman Empire. Rome was built on power and strength and it was displayed through violence and dominance. They didn’t just want to destroy the people who were against them, they wanted to humiliate them. It’s why the cross was such a popular form of execution. It was a graphic way of humiliating a criminal as they die while reminding everyone else who held the power.

After a military victory, Rome would hold a *Triumph*. It was a parade where the general or emperor would enter the city in a chariot wearing a crown and purple robe to show their power and authority. Behind him, prisoners of war marched in chains. Soldiers would show off their conquered enemies and spoils of battle. It was all about displaying domination and strength. And to make it all look even bigger, a delegation of people would run out to join the parade as they saw it coming into town.

This is what power looked like to the people John is writing to. They had the power to do what they pleased, when they please, to whomever they pleased. It was this power that had taken the lives of people within these churches John is writing to because they refused to bow their knee to the emperor. It was this power that had exiled John to the island of Patmos because he refused to stop talking about Jesus and building His Church.

And it was on this island, where he’d been banished because of his faith, that John receives a vision, that he records in a letter, that we now know as Revelation. As we continue our series in this letter, let’s look at Revelation 5:1...(READ vs. 1-5, leave on screen as I work through the text)

Pause to explain vs. 4: Scrolls – Contain details about God’s judgement that will once and for all eradicate evil from His world so His people can dwell in peace in the New Jerusalem.

But he weeps because there's no one worthy to open them. No one in heaven...or on earth...had the power.

And I think he weeps because he's recognizing that if no one is able to implement God's plan to fully and finally rescue His people from the evil powers of this dark world, then there's no hope for us. There's no hope of redemption and vindication for those who unjustly suffer at the hands of evil leaders and systems and dictators. There's no hope for people who have lost their lives or jobs or reputation for the sake of Christ.

But then one of the elders says in verse 5...

Finally, One with power greater than anyone in heaven or on earth appears. He's described as a Lion from the tribe of Judah. Lion is an image of power and might. Tribe of Judah represents royalty. And as John turns to see him, I imagine his mind went to an image of strength and authority that, in one act, could avenge those persecuted by Rome and destroy their power once and for all.

But, when he turns around, this is what he sees...(READ vs. 6a, *leave up*)

John turns expecting to see this great and powerful Lion, but instead, he sees a Lamb. And not just any Lamb, this lamb was *looking as if it had been slain*. You can't get a more contrasting image of power than a lamb looking as if it had been slain. But this is not some meek and mild lamb. This is a Geo Metro lapping cars at the Indy 500! **This is Jesus**. And because of his death and resurrection, Jesus, the slain Lamb of God, is the only One worthy and powerful enough to open the scrolls and fulfill God's plans and purposes.

John continues and says this Lamb is...(READ vs. 6b-14)

This slain Lamb is the One who has received all power and authority and honor and glory for all eternity! John is writing to people who are feeling the weight of Roman power all around them. They're being persecuted for their faith. Some are losing their life. The Church is being tempted to give into external pressures and make internal compromises out of fear of the culture and powers around them.

And I think what Jesus wants His people to see is that ultimate power and authority doesn't belong to any system or government or person in this world; it belongs to the Lamb who was slain. It belongs to Jesus. He alone is worthy. He alone is victorious.

These contrasting images of power make us come face to face with what I think is **THE** question in the book of Revelation: **Who will you align yourself with?** The culture and political powers around us can take your life, but that's the only power they have. Jesus has eternal power and He is the author of everlasting life.

Over the next several chapters, John follows this Lamb as He opens the scroll, unleashing God's judgement on evil in our world and vindicating the suffering of His people. We'll talk about it more next week and get into some of the numbers and images of Revelation...the weird stuff we're all curious about.

But as we do a flyover of them today, I just kept coming back to this quote I heard from a professor at Duke Divinity School. Richard Lischer says that John's words in Revelation can be summed up like this: "I have seen the future, and it belongs to God."

More than anything else, I think that's what John wants the original readers of this letter to know. It's what he wants US to know. He has seen the future and it belongs to God. Some of these images of judgement coming from the seals and trumpets and bowls, they're graphic and disturbing, but I think they've got a twofold purpose: They're meant to comfort God's people who are suffering under the evil powers of this world, but they're also meant to convict those who are compromising their faith out of fear, in order to fit into the culture around them.

Even today, it seems like Satan is winning and will have the final word. Around the world, the Church is experiencing more persecution than ever before. In our own backyard, upholding a Biblical worldview is seen as repressive and bigoted. Some Christian values are labeled hateful, causing many followers of Jesus to just quietly fade into the background or make compromises in order to fit in.

Many of us know the pain the powers of our culture can inflict on those who don't align with their status quo. And, all the while, Revelation is asking us: Who will you align yourself with? Will you choose to save your life, your reputation, your job? Or are you willing to lose everything for the One who will rule and reign for all eternity? The truth is, there's a cost either way. And the cost you're willing to pay comes down to who, or what, you believe has the final word.

I think the images of the slain Lamb who is victorious and who holds all power and authority are meant to encourage followers of Jesus to not give up or give in. The evil and suffering you're facing right now because of your faith, it may inflict a wound, but it doesn't have the final word.

Jesus holds the power for all eternity. The battle belongs to Him and the victory has already been won. Yes, there are tears and suffering now, but there is joy that awaits on the other side. So, hold on and don't lose hope. This present world may belong to Satan and his minions who wreak havoc all around us, but we have seen the future, we can read the rest of the story, and, in the end, it all belongs to God.

Until then, the book of Revelation inspires us to live faithfully, no matter what the cost. And it puts an exclamation mark on a theme we see run all throughout Scripture...In God's Kingdom, power is displayed through sacrifice.

This has always been the way God works. We see it in Joseph forgiving his brothers who betrayed him. Moses laying down his royal status to suffer with God's people. David sparing Saul when he had the chance to take his life and protect himself. Most of all, we see it in Jesus Himself, our slain Lamb and Savior who laid down His life to defeat sin and death.

In God's Kingdom, power is displayed through sacrifice. And right in the middle of all the chaos of the scroll being open, the seals breaking, the trumpets blasting, the bowls of judgement being poured out on Satan and the evil he brought into the world...John shares this image in Revelation 12:11,

"They triumphed over him [Satan]...how?...by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

This is how the people of God overcome the evil in this world. It's not by picking up a sword or grasping for power. It's not by blending in or bowing down to the Beast. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb. By trusting that His sacrifice has saved and secured us and that nothing can separate us from Him, even death.

We overcome by the testimony of faithful men and women who have counted the cost and chose to follow Jesus, come what may. Their story of clinging to Jesus rather than safety or status inspire us to do the same. And it inspires others to follow Jesus, too.

In March 2015, twenty-one men, dressed in orange jumpsuits, were led by ISIS to a beach in Libya. Twenty of the men were Coptic Christians from Egypt and had been captured just a few weeks earlier because of their faith in Jesus. They were charged with being "people of the cross." The 21st man was from Ghana. He wasn't a Christian. He just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and got lumped in with them.

And on that day at the beach, 10 years ago, each of these men were given a chance to deny Jesus and live. One by one, they refused. And one by one, they were beheaded. They could have saved their life by rejecting their faith, but their faith was unshakable. They knew what awaited them on the other side, and they chose Jesus.

When they got to the 21st man, the man who wasn't a Christian, but had watched the courage of these men who refused to deny Christ, they asked if he would reject Jesus to save his life. He could have easily said, "This is all a mistake. I'm not even a Christian!" But instead, he reportedly said, "Their God is my God," as he knelt down to die alongside of them.

It may seem like evil won that day, but when you pull back the curtain of Heaven, you see that they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony. They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death and their story inspires our own faith today.

When the world sees people who endure hardship without losing their hope. When the world sees people who respond to hatred with love. When the world sees people who suffer with courage and worship with joy. When the world see this, they see the power of Christ on display. They see our lives declare that **All power and authority and dominion belongs to Jesus, and we will bow to nothing and no one but Him!**

Not to Babylon. Not to the Beast, Not to fear or comfort. We bow to the Lamb who is slain, but standing. Wounded but victorious. And we will follow Him, no matter the cost, until the day when He will make all things new.

Communion

As we come to communion, we don't have to come in fear or defeat because of our sin or the ways we have given in to pressure and compromise. The little ways we've denied Christ with our words or actions.

The author of Hebrews says that we can approach the throne of grace with confidence. Not in ourselves, but confidence in the Lamb who was slain for us. Jesus gave His life so we could find new life now and have eternal life forever. Communion reminds us that, by His body and blood, we have overcome. Not by power or perfection, but by the sacrifice of Jesus.

So, let's take the bread, remembering His body given for us.

Let's drink the cup, remembering His blood that was poured out for the forgiveness of sin.

All power and authority and dominion belong to Jesus, and we bow to nothing and no one but Him.

Invitation

Maybe today, you realize that you've been following the wrong thing...comfort, power, success, approval. You've been bowing to lesser kings, hoping they could give you life. We've all been there. Chasing things only to come up empty.

There is only One who is worthy. There is only One who can give you the life you're looking for. Jesus is inviting you to find life in Him today. If you're ready to begin following Him, we'd love to talk to you and pray with you.

Prayer

You or someone you love to is tempted to give up and give in. Let us come alongside and pray for them with you.