

Seeing Jesus – As He Is

Revelation 5:1-14

I'd like to ask you this morning to think about your life this past week.

What were the things that you were anxious about?

What were the things you cried about?

What were the temptations that you faced?

What fears did you experience?

We don't tend to talk a lot about our fears and failures in the Christian life. We just live our life, day to day and week to week, doing the best that we can. But I am utterly convinced that the remedy for every fear, the grace for every failure, and the cure for every temptation is found in our text this morning. Actually seeing Jesus as he is, in his glory, is the cure for all that is weak and fallen in us.

I take this conviction from the words of John the Apostle, the same man who wrote this book of Revelation, who says in his 1st epistle,

*1 John 3:2–3 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, **because** we shall see him as he is.*

Seeing him as he is will immediately remove any desire for sin as our hearts are immediately and forever enraptured by his beauty. Seeing him "as he is" will immediately remove all fear and doubt and anxiety as we realize the glory of his power and the infinite depth of our security in him.

And though we do not yet see him face to face, Revelation 5 is the most comprehensive and clear view of Jesus, as he is right now in glory, that we have in all of Scripture. Jesus pulls back the veil between time and eternity for us so that we can see him in his glory. If you are a child of God, there is nothing greater you desire. If you are unconverted this morning, there is nothing greater that you need.

I. The Crisis

5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

A. The Purposes of God

The scroll that John saw was similar to a Roman legal will. Legal documents in those days were sealed with wax, to be opened only by those with the proper authority to do so. For instance, when a wealthy person died, they would leave behind both a legal will AND an

appointed executor of that will. The executor was the only person with the *legal authority* to break the seal, open the scroll, and carry out the plans of the deceased.

What John sees in the right hand of the one who sits on the throne is a scroll containing the decrees of God, his “final will and testament” for the church and for this world. As we move through the book and the seals are opened, we will see God's mighty acts of justice and redemption as he overthrows the works of the Devil and rescues his chosen people. This scroll is about the redemptive purposes of God for all human history.

But the vision centers on a crisis – the most profound crisis of all human history. Who is the executor? Who is able to open the scroll and carry out the redemptive purposes of God?

B. The Failure of Humanity

5:2-3 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.

The book of God’s purposes was sealed with seven seals. It was time for the executor to come and open the book and carry out the purposes and decrees. An angel cries out with a loud voice, calling for the executor to come forward. Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? Who has the authority? Who has been appointed to open this book and carry out the redemptive purposes and plans of God?

John must have waited with bated breath. Who would come forward? But, to his dismay, no one came forward. The call went out over all the world – and there was no response. Just deafening silence. No one was found worthy.

What an incredible indictment against Adam and his race. Scholars estimate that 108 billion people have been born in the history of the world. And there’s not a single one who is worthy? You see, God had created Adam, in his image, to do this very thing. Adam was called to be the Vice-Regent of God, the one who would exercise God’s dominion over the earth. He was called, in faith and obedience, to wage war with Satan and his host. That was Adam's calling, his mandate, his mission! But now as the call goes out over the earth for the Obedient Image Bearer of God, the Vice-Regent of Creation, to come and unfold God’s decrees, no responding cry is heard. Only silence. Adam has fallen; he has betrayed his calling and allied himself with God's enemy, he and all his billions of descendants.

Rom. 3:12 ...no one does good, not even one.

NO ONE was found worthy.

C. The Weeping

5:4 And I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

John sees the implications and is devastated: "I began to weep loudly."

The word *weep* is followed by the superlative *many* or *much*. I wept and I wept. This was not a few tears trickling down the old man's cheeks. His broken heart was pouring out its grief and anguish with unrestrained sobs of distress as he looked out over a lost, ruined, and unredeemed world.

It is striking that to see that John's weeping follows a thread in Scripture. Those who are most gripped by the purposes of God and the plight of mankind tend to weep most over the lost.

- When do we see Jesus weeping? Only twice – once at the tomb of Lazarus where he is weeping for all the bondage of sin and death and unbelief in the crowd around him and the grave before him. And then he weeps loudly over the unbelief and coming judgement of Israel.

Luke 13:34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem...How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

- When does Paul weep? He weeps over bondage and unbelief of the Jews and over the ruin of sinners.

Phil. 3:18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

There is something about true godliness that weeps over the plight of a lost world. John is weeping over the tragic failure of fallen man and the devastating hopeless plight of a Christ-less world. If no one is worthy to open the scrolls, then all the redemptive purposes of God come to naught – no one is rescued and the Devil wins.

Beeke: "He weeps because he knows that there will be no salvation for God's people, no coming of God's kingdom, and no hope for the human race unless someone can accomplish the purposes of God and fulfill His promises." (197)

Have you ever seriously contemplated a Christ-less world? What if the death and evil of this world really was all there was? What if there was no incarnation – no Word made flesh? What if there were no gospels – no story to be told of Christ's life, death, and resurrection? What if the world we live in had never been invaded by the redemptive power and purposes of God in Christ? What if there was no Christmas? No cross? No Christ? That means that

there will be no judgement on the Devil and no redemption for the elect. Nothing gets made new. Death conquers all. All that's left is utter despair.

Bertrand Russel, famed British atheist, was asked on British radio, after spending his adult life denying the existence of God, and now faced death, "What do you have to hang on to now?" And he replied, "I have nothing to hang on to but grim, unyielding despair."

John weeps and weeps with the utter despair of history without a Savior. With no executor of God's plans for judgment and redemption the world is left without hope. There will be no salvation for sinners; no victory over the devil and death; no new heaven and earth.

II. The Christ

5:5 And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

What? Someone has been found? Yes! There IS ONE among all the sons of men who is found worthy! "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David."

A. The Lion

These are two prominent Old Testament titles for the coming Messiah. They speak specifically to his royal reign and might. The Messiah will be a mighty King and the nations will be gathered to him.

Is. 11:10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

And this is precisely what John sees in heaven: the King enthroned, and the nations gathered around him. People from every tribe and tongue gathered around the Lion "who conquered."

This is magnificent news!! History is NOT bound to the failure of man but to the victory of Christ!

The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has triumphed! He is **ABLE** to open the scroll and it's seven seals!

So the elder says to John, "Dry your tears! Behold! Look! See for yourself! The Lion of Judah! See the One who is worthy to accomplish all of God's redeeming purposes for mankind."

You can imagine this old man drying his eyes and turning his gaze to see the great Lion of Judah. But – he doesn't see a Lion. He sees a Lamb.

B. The Lamb

5:6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Instead of a mighty Lion he sees a Lamb, "as though it had been slain (or slaughtered)." The term refers to the sacrifices of OT Israel. A lamb would be taken, its head lifted up, and its throat slit with a knife so the blood would rush out, staining the white wool. The Lamb John saw bore the unmistakable signs of a lamb that had been ceremonially sacrificed.

Of course, John **knows** this Lamb! This is Jesus, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He loved this Lamb. In fact, John's favorite title for Christ in the book of Revelation is Lamb. He uses it 28 times in reference to Jesus. John loves this Lamb who was slain. Remember, John had seen it happen. He had watched as Jesus' body was nailed to a Roman cross, and a spear thrust into his side. He had seen Jesus dead and buried in a tomb. But he had also witnessed Christ's victory over death. He had seen the empty tomb. He had seen Jesus numerous times following his resurrection, and then had watched as the resurrected Christ ascended into his glory.

Can you imagine the joy of old John as his eyes settle on his beloved Jesus once more in his exaltation? Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, now reigning at the right hand of God. Jesus, the Lamb of God who gave his life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of those who would believe in him. Jesus, the Lion who conquered death and hell. The Victor over Satan and all his demonic host.

III. The Coronation

A. The Service

5:7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

Jesus takes the scroll from the hand of God. This is the glory of Jesus. Remember, in the case of a will, it is enacted **ONLY** after someone has died and there is an inheritance that needs to be distributed. The executor of the will is the living person who makes sure that the will of the deceased is carried out. Notice that Jesus is both the deceased and the executor! His death provided a vast inheritance for those who belong to him, and in his resurrected glory he ensures that what he died to procure shall be distributed by his power. He

disperses his own inheritance to those to whom he has chosen to give it! And he does so from the throne of heaven and as the Lord of heaven!

This is the comfort and confidence of the church of Christ as we engage in the mission of Christ. John the Apostle, in his old age, sees the church of Christ struggling. In only 60 years, they have made a mess of things. They have allowed heresy and immorality into the church. The world was at war with the church. The great serpent was seeking to destroy her – and seemed to be winning. What hope was there for the church? The only hope was the Lord of human history, the Lion and the Lamb. Jesus, the head of the church reigning on the throne of heaven for his church, assures our ultimate and eternal victory!

B. The Song (8-14)

The remaining verses record the worship of heaven following the coronation of King Jesus! In ever-widening bands of worship, all of creation responds to glory and rule of Christ Jesus in exuberant praise!

First the four living creatures and the 24 elders, representing the church of Jesus, take up the song:

***5:8-10** And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*

Notice two things:

- The church sings first! The church is the special creation of God created specifically for the worship of Christ Jesus. As the primary recipients of all the gifts and glories of Christ's sacrifice, we **MUST** lead the way in worship!
- The heart of our celebration of Christ is his sacrifice for sinners.

William Hendriksen: "It is not the Lamb, but the slain Lamb which is exalted. It is not simply Christ, but the Christ crucified which is the power of God...And who draws all men unto God."

Secondly, in verses 11-12, thousands upon thousands of angels join in with a sevenfold anthem of praise. In a "loud voice" they sang:

***5:12** "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"*

And then finally, all of creation!

5:13 *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"*

John is recording this for our benefit! This Jesus is our Jesus! This Lion is your Lord. This Lamb is your Savior. Our call is to respond in faith!

5:14 *And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Amen. So be it. We believe it. We trust it.

What difference would it make in your life if God were actually sovereign? What difference would it make in your attitude, your actions, if the Son of God really came to this earth to rescue you from death and the Devil by giving his life for you? And what difference would it make if that same Jesus who loved you and loves you, is actually, in truth, right now, on the throne of heaven sovereignly working for your eternal joy?

If you really believed it...

- wouldn't it feel like the weight of all your worries rolling off your shoulders?
- wouldn't you laugh more because of the sheer goodness of God?
- wouldn't you weep for different things – less about your misfortunes and much more for those who are lost?

Jesus really is the sovereign Lord and King over your life. We need to believe that down to the marrow of our bones. The church of John's day was facing increasing persecution: suffering, sorrow, loss. They need to know that history was not being written by the Emperor of Rome, but by the hand of a sovereign God, enacted by the Lion and the Lamb.

We need to believe that the One who reigns is Jesus Christ, the one who gave his life for our sin. Seeing Jesus as he is will radically change your life. We just need to lean in to it – to continually say, "Amen." So be it, Lord. Amen.