

UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part four

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Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE GOD WHO CONTROLS HISTORY AND THE WORK OF HIS SON

The first verse of chapter four prepares the reader for the fact that a corner has been turned in the book. We are about to embark on a new section of this unfolding revelation: **Revelation 4:1** - "**After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."**

I think it's very important to understand the **purpose** of chapters four and five of Revelation. Actually, they don't so much contain the **action** of the story as they paint the **background** or **setting** of the action that is about to take place. In other words, if the rest of the book of Revelation represents the **play** itself, these fourth and fifth chapters are more like the **stage** or the **set** where the play takes place.

There is an **understanding**, a **perspective**, that the Spirit of God wants to have settle on our hearts in the study of these two chapters. And I hope to show that this perspective is important for **all** Christians, at **all** times. In other words, while these chapters are very important for those of us studying the end of time, they were also important for John and the early Christians as well.

How would you feel if you were John? He's invested all of his adult life in ministry to those congregations addressed by Jesus in chapters two and three. The vast majority of those churches were in terrible disrepair. And John couldn't do anything about it! John was captive on this tiny, four mile square island called Patmos. And he was there for faithfully doing what he had been called to do. Those are the kinds of circumstances that breed **discouragement**. You can easily feel like a **failure**. You feel as though you have no **future**.

This is when our Lord calls John to come into an "**open door**" - **Revelation 4:1** - "**After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."**

Let me first of all give what I feel is the **big picture** - the **general meaning** of these two chapters, and then we'll examine some details of application as we close:

1) **THE BIG PICTURE OF REVELATION FOUR AND FIVE IS THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD AND THE KEY TO THIS WORLD'S HISTORY REVEALED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST**

The central picture of chapter four is the **throne of Almighty God** settled in heaven:

Revelation 4:5-11 - "**From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, [6] and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: [7] the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. [8] And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!' [9] And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, [10] the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,[11] 'Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.'**"

I want you to notice some very important details here that will reveal a **contrast** between the theme of chapter four and that of chapter five. And the distinction is very important. Chapter four is all about the greatness of God Almighty. He is especially pictured as the one who is to be praised because, "**Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created**"(4:11).

There are many different **beings** around this majestic throne, but there are no **people**. This is a vision of the utter **holiness**

and *majesty* of God. This vision of God is much like *Isaiah's* or *Ezekiel's*. The emphasis is on the *distance* such a God is from us. He is in a league all by Himself. No one can approach such a throne.

Now turn to chapter five. Here the emphasis is on, not God Almighty, but a *Lamb that has been slain*:

Revelation 5:6-13 - "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. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] 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. [9] 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, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.' [11] Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, [12] saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!' [13] And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'"

Now we have a different song theming the worship around the throne. The praise has to do, not only with the *majestic greatness of God Almighty*, but the *approachableness of the throne of heaven through the work of the Lamb*: **Revelation 5:9-10** - "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, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.'"

Certainly the message of both chapters is absolutely true. And we need both the emphasis of *blazing holiness* and *amazing grace*. But I believe we're meant to see these two dispensations (though I don't like using that word) in their full contrast.

All of this leads to the second big picture point:

2) **CHAPTER FIVE FOCUSES OUR ATTENTION, NOT ONLY ON THE LAMB, BUT ALSO ON THE SEALED BOOK OF THIS WORLD'S FUTURE IN THE WILL OF GOD**

Revelation 5:1-9 - "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. [2] And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' [3] And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, [4] and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. [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.' [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. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] 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. [9] 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....'"

There is the *book* of Revelation, and then there is the *sealed book within the book of Revelation*. In other words, there is a book within the book. This book, like ancient wills of that day, was sealed with seven seals. This is the way wills were witnessed. Seven different people would witness the will, then seal it. When the time came to open the will, only those who sealed it, or their representatives, could open the seal.

This sealed book represents all that will unfold in chapters 5 through 18 of the book of Revelation. God has a plan. God is in control of this world's events. So here's the logical question: *Why doesn't Almighty God just rip this book open all by Himself?* And the answer to that question is the most important thing you can learn from the book of Revelation. It's more important than the time of the rapture, or the nature of the millennium, or the identity of the Antichrist, or anything else people speculate about.

Here's how God's will is going to be brought about in the fallen, sinful planet. God is, of course, able to unfold His will any way He chooses. But, and this is the very important point, He is only going to unfold His plan in this world **redemptively through Jesus Christ**. Consider the implications of this central fact for all the world's religions trying to reach and please God. Think of all the people who like to talk about God and finding God, and doing His will, but don't acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This fifth chapter is crucial. God reveals how **HE** has chosen to open up the scroll of His will for this entire planet. And only **Jesus** is able to open it up!

3) **PRACTICAL LIFE LESSONS FROM REVELATION FOUR AND FIVE**

Let's wrap up with some lessons for Christians from these two chapters. These are lessons for **all** Christians, living at **all** times. They were lessons for the Apostle John, and they are the same lessons for you and me:

- a) ***Life Lesson Number One - If you want to overcome in any trying circumstance you face, you need to get hold of an eternal perspective and never let it go.***

Revelation 4:1-2 - "After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." [2] At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne."

This is what Jesus calls John to fix his attention on. In the middle of all John's turmoil, there is a fixed throne. Never study the book of Revelation until you've had your mind firmly riveted to the throne of God at the center of the universe.

John is brought to the **vantage point of the future**. But he's not brought there just so he can make his guesses and draw up his charts of Bible prophecy. **John's in a mess right now!** And he's called to bring this promise of God's **future** into the mess of his **present**. All our problems need to be set into the context of both **God's eternal throne** and **God's certain accomplishment of His future**.

John is going to be shown devils, demons, beasts, dragons, armies and everything in between. "John, remember, none of them, nor all of them together, is going to thwart the unlocking of God's future through the Lamb!"

This is the enduring feature of the love of God in Christ described by Paul at the end of Romans chapter eight. Nothing - past - present- or future - can separate us from Christ. And nothing coming in the book of history opened in Revelation chapter 5 can **overcome** God's settled purpose in Christ Jesus for your life and mine. The slain Lamb is the **ruler** of history.

- b) ***Life Lessons Number Two - Don't look for a door out of your circumstances - Look for a door into God's promise and presence.***

Apparently this message actually needs to be **trumpeted** into our ears, it goes so much against our natural reaction to much of life - **Revelation 4:1** - "After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me **like a trumpet**, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

There are some exceptions, but the general rule of thumb is you are not likely to find God's will, nor God's help, by running **out** of trying situations. I talk to people every week who haven't even given God a fair chance and are already looking for a way **out** of their marriage. People look for ways **out** of challenging commitments. They look for ways **out** of anything that stretches and sometimes hurts.

Listen, **God will make a way!** We sing it all the time. But take the door **into** God's presence and promise, not the door **out** of difficult circumstances.

- c) ***Life Lessons Number Three - Stay close to Jesus through recommitting yourself to passionate, thoughtful worship of the Lamb.***

I hope to show you, and I think it is no accident, that every time a fresh burst of end time activity takes place in the book of Revelation, it is always **preceded** and **followed** by songs of exaltation and praise around the throne.

This is why, you may have noticed, whenever I lead our church into some pressing issue of corporate prayer I almost always call upon the congregation to **begin** with strong praise to the risen Lord. It's not **emotionalism**. It's the **pattern** of heaven itself.

Worship puts us in the company of those already around the throne of God. Worship links us up with heaven. Worship links us up with what God is **doing**. Resist the tendency to murmur and complain. Complainers and critics are spiritually a dime a dozen.

When you face tough times, remember the eternal throne of God, remember the difference between the **eternal** and the **temporary**, take the door into His presence through the Lamb, and worship Him in Spirit and in truth.