

Tears to Triumph

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- [0 : 0 0] Thank you. Now, in English, Revelation chapter 5. 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.
- And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals. And no one in heaven or earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.
- And I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 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.
- And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain. The seven horns and the seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the earth.
- [1 : 1 1] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the lamb, each holding a harp and a golden bowl 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 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. Then I looked. 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, 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.
- 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.
- And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped. Amen.
- [2 : 4 4] Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, thank you so much to the leadership team at the Tron here for inviting me along this evening to bring God's word.
- When Willie mentioned at the beginning we have two different languages represented tonight, I thought that was an introduction for me, Glaswegian and English, but obviously he was on about our Iranian friends.
- So there's actually three languages here tonight. There's Glaswegian, English and Farsi. But before we look at this passage from Revelation chapter 5, why don't I pray and ask that God would help us with his word and that he would speak to us through it?
- Let me pray. Father, we thank you so much that your word meets all of our needs. And you know us better than we know ourselves.

You know every single person. And all the details of our lives, every person in this building tonight. You know the highs and the lows that we are experiencing.

[3 : 48] You know the things that we might have brought in here that we just feel we could never share with anybody else. And we thank you, Father, that the living word can meet all of our needs.

And we thank you that ultimately all of these needs and the word itself is pointing us to Jesus. And we pray that you would point and direct our eyes and our gaze upon Jesus afresh this evening.

We want to be those Greeks in John's Gospel who come and say, Sirs, we want to see Jesus. So, Father, please, in the power of the Holy Spirit, lift us up and let us see the glory of your Son.

In whose name we pray. Amen. I want us to begin this evening by imagining how we might feel as a Christian if we went through something, a particular trial, a crisis, something that made us feel as a Christian that God wasn't in control of everything as we thought he was.

There are Christians who experience this, real believers, who go through something that momentarily makes them ask, Where is God? Is God really in control?

[5 : 07] Recently, it was just a couple of weeks ago while I was on holiday, I went to visit a Christian couple in Whitehaven in West Cumbria. I used to work down there as the assistant minister. And this couple, they're in their 70s.

But their son, Andrew, went out to work last September and Andrew died. Andrew was a Christian. He was married. Worked at his local church.

Just went to his work. His mum was speaking to him the day before. And then he dies the next day. And Andrew's mum told me when I met up with her that she knew the Lord was upholding her.

The Lord was keeping her afloat. But she did have questions. Why, Lord? What good can come of Andrew's death? And Lord, where is your glory to be seen in this?

And we read Scripture and we see that Scripture itself doesn't shy away from recording trials and events that genuine believers go through that for a moment rattles their faith.

[6 : 12] You read the book of Job. And Job's continually asking and crying out, What's going on? Lord, where are you? You see it in Luke chapter 7.

John the Baptist, he's sitting in prison. And he's not rejoicing. He's not working everything out. He's asking Jesus a question. Are you the one? And perhaps some of us here this evening are going through something.

And I mentioned this in the prayer at the beginning. Something that no one else knows about. You don't even feel you can share it. But it's making you wonder, where is God? And is God really in control?

I'm guessing in a crowd this size, there will be a handful of people that's going through that. But this was something that Joni Erikson Tadda went through.

Most of us will know Joni's story. How she dived into shallow water. And in that moment she suffered a fracture that took her from being an active teenager to being paralyzed from the shoulders down.

[7 : 12] And in her autobiography, Joni tells how for two years after her accident, she went into depression. She was a believer. Believers get depressed. She had suicidal thoughts and she was tempted to doubt her faith altogether.

And Joni was broken hearted, not just with the prospect of not being able to walk again, but probably more so with the thought that God perhaps wasn't in control as she thought he was.

That's a bad place to be as a believer, isn't it? It's God in control. When in this passage we're looking at tonight, we meet another believer who for a moment is broken hearted because it seems to him that God's plan for humanity and creation, it might not come to pass.

In Revelation 5, the Apostle John continues to look at and to listen to the vision that he begins seeing and hearing back in chapter 4. If you've got your Bible opened in chapter 4, verse 2, you'll see there that John is swept up in the Holy Spirit and he's taken to the door of heaven.

And he's permitted to see activity going on within the very throne room of God. And what John must have seen must have been so awesome and powerful that he would have been left breathless almost.

[8 : 30] Look at chapter 4, verse 5. Flashes of lightning, deafening rumblings of peals of thunder. It's a picture that takes us back to the law being given at Sinai. Look at verses 6 to 8.

He sees angels covered with eyes who are flying before God's throne and they never stop saying day and night the words, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

Verses 10 and 11. John sees the 24 elders who, my understanding is, they represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. Old and new covenants.

They fall down and lay before God their crowns and they declare that God is worthy to receive glory and honor and power because God created all things and by his will all things existed and were created.

We read this and the whole scene is so amazing. It's hard for us to get our heads around it fully. Then John's vision continues in chapter 5, verse 1, where he sees in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, a scroll which we are told was sealed with seven seals.

[9 : 44] Now from Revelation chapter 6 to the end of the book, we learn that the content of this scroll concerns God's plan of salvation and judgment for the whole earth. It represents God's eternal plan and purpose.

It's quite important. This is a scroll spoken of by the prophet Daniel back in Daniel 12, where an angel tells Daniel to close up and seal the words of the scroll of his vision until the time of the end.

And that means for us from Revelation 6 onwards, we're reading about the end of time and history as we know it. After seeing in God's right hand this scroll about the end, look at chapter 5, verse 2.

John sees this mighty angel who with a loud voice asks a question. And the question is this, who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

In other words, is there anybody worthy to come forward and bring history to a conclusion? Is there anyone who has the right to interpret and implement God's eternal plan of salvation and judgment?

[10 : 56] Is there anyone out there? Now we're not told, but it seems that there must have been a period of silence. And it makes John give an answer in verse 3 that must have made his heart sink.

Look what he says there. No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. John looks at himself and he sees, I'm not worthy.

John looks at the angels and as awesome as these angels are, they're not worthy. John looks at the 24 elders around the throne and he sees that none of the elders, and it's usually always the case with elders, isn't it?

None of them are worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. So the challenge has gone out to the whole of creation. Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

But no one is able to accept the challenge. And that leads to John in verse 4, weeping loudly. Just like Joni Erickson, just like my friends in Whitehaven that I mentioned at the start, like many Christians throughout the ages, perhaps like some of us here this evening, John is spiritually broken hearted.

[12 : 16] For he knows that if this scroll in God's hand remains sealed, then God's plan for humanity and all of creation, it's at best postponed, and at worst, it's thwarted.

John knows if this scroll remains sealed, then God's purposes cannot be realized. And so we are back to the question that we began with. Is God really in control?

Loads of people ask that. People are asking that every day. They look at the world. All the mess, whether you're Brexit or Remain, or all the stuff going on in Sri Lanka today, bombs going off as people are meeting in services, just like this.

Is God really in control? Now before seeing all of this, the Apostle John, he's obviously aware that Jesus is the Son of God who reveals God's plan and brings God's plan to fruition.

But it seems the case that everything's happening so quickly in the vision, it hardly has time to connect what he knows to the heaven realities that he sees in front of him. But as the readers, we have the chance to immediately make the connection and to think things through.

[13 : 28] And we do this by reading what follows where as John is struck with grief, one of the elders from around God's throne says in verse 5, have a look at these words. The elder says, Weep no more.

Behold the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, he has conquered so that he can open the scroll and seven seals.

Now just pause. Imagine you're John. Try and feel his relief as he hears these words. Remember he's broken.

The challenge is without who is worthy, no one comes forward. John's crushed. And then he hears these words, there is somebody. He's been told that God's plan for humanity and creation is after all going to be fulfilled.

Creation won't go on groaning forever. God's enemies, they won't be victorious forever. The bombers in Sri Lanka, the people who are murdering Christians every day, they're not going to be victorious forever.

[14 : 39] Death and the devil, they won't have the last say. Why? Because there is one who is conquered. There is one who is able.

There is one who is worthy to break open the seals of the scroll. There's a brilliant song I've been looking at on YouTube that's all about Revelation 5.

It's by, I think the band's name are certainly the two guys. They're called Shane and Shane. And if you've never heard of Shane and Shane, put into YouTube later on, Shane and Shane, he is worthy.

And it's all about Revelation 5. Revelation 5. And the song speaks of a world being broken. Welcome to the world. Of deepening shadows. Possibly some of us here this evening.

Of darkness trying to stop light from getting through. Of wishing a world could be made new. Is that what all of us are longing for? The world to be made new? Look at the state of it.

[15 : 37] God's good world that he made. And man's made a mess of it. And we're crying out. We're longing there's something within us that wants us to be made new. And the song is asking the same question as Revelation 5.

Is anyone worthy to remake God's broken world? Is anyone worthy to bring God's light into a darkened world? Is anyone worthy to make the mess that we see all around us of which we are part?

Is anybody worthy to make it new? Well, let the elder answer. The lion of the tribe of Judah. The root of David.

He has conquered. So that he can open the scroll and its seven seals. And the one spoken of here, he's first described by this elder who speaks to John.

He's first described as being the lion of the tribe of Judah. Now I'm sure those of us who know our Bibles, we know this takes us back to Genesis 49 where as Jacob pronounces blessing and his sons, he comes to Judah and he says these words, You are a lion's cub, O Judah.

[16 : 47] You return from the prey, my son. Like a lion, he crouches and lies down. Like a lioness, who dares to rouse him? And Jacob goes on to tell Judah, The scepter will not depart from him, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs.

In other words, someone at some point will come from the tribe of Judah who will be a king, whose rule will be forever. And their lion-like characteristics will assure all God's people that they will be strong and fierce and victorious in fighting God's enemies.

That's the kind of ruler and the kind of king that we need. But there's a second title here. The second title the elder uses to describe him who is worthy is the root of David.

And again, we're taking back into the depths of the Old Testament. And that's really the key to understanding the whole book of Revelation. The title root of David, I'm sure you know, it takes us back to 2 Samuel 7 where God makes this wonderful covenant with David who's from the tribe of Judah.

Promising to establish the kingdom of one of David's sons who will have a kingdom that will last forever. Again, this is the kind of ruler and king that all of us here in Glasgow tonight need.

[18 : 10] Now, after being told to look and see the lion of the tribe of Judah, I don't know about you, but I have to expect to read on and I'm sure John does as well to look and to see the appearance of some great and mighty warrior holding a loft, a sword, perhaps somebody that's like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Heman.

But John doesn't see a warrior. But look at verse 6. He sees a lamb. And not only a lamb, but a lamb that looks as though it's been slain.

So John looks for a lion and he sees a lamb. He looks for one who will save and yet he sees one who is slain.

What John is seeing here is something that we see and hear every time we look at or read the good news of the gospel. Namely, that God achieves his triumph and delivers his people not through the fireworks of military might, but through the weakness of crucifixion.

Catches us by surprise, doesn't it? Where's the lion? And I don't know about you, but this is something I continually need to be reminded of.

[19 : 34] That God is building his kingdom here we all are. He's building his church not through human strength and wisdom. Not by having a millionaire in the congregation whose money is going to get everything done and at this point the treasurer wants to object stop him right away.

He builds his kingdom not by having a perfect polished ministry team who will never make a mistake or let us down and at this point the congregation want to object. God builds his kingdom, his church not by preventing suffering or hardship or pain from coming into the church so that life for his people this side of eternity will be easy and at this point we all want to object.

Now what we're seeing here, what we're being reminded is something I so easily forget. That God has ordained the building of his kingdom, his church, through the thing that all of us in this building despise most.

Through weakness, through brokenness, through emptiness, through the foolishness of preaching the message of a Jewish man on a cross.

we're so familiar with it all, aren't we? God in his wisdom has chose to display the power of his son's cross not by healing Joni Erickson from paralysis but by keeping us severely disabled in a wheelchair and leading people to Christ through her testimony.

[21 : 16] Is that what you would have chose? I wouldn't. God has chosen to display the power of his son's cross not by taking away the pain of a couple in Whitehaven, crushed by the loss of their son, but by sustaining and upholding this couple in their brokenness for all the world to see.

So the Sunday after their son dies, where are they? They're in church with tears streaming down their face, worshipping Jesus. as Revelation 5 puts it, Behold a lion, I saw a lamb.

No matter how familiar we in church are with the gospel, when we come to Revelation 5 and passages like it, we find it surprising that God would choose an animal like a slaughtered lamb to symbolise his Messiah King.

We almost want to take God aside. God can wave a word with you. It doesn't fit the narrative. And in all of this we see again, as we see throughout the pages of scripture, just how different God is to man.

Because when men look to symbolise power, strength and rule, what do they come up with? Mighty beasts and birds of prey. So you look at Russia, they've got the big bear. Britain, we have the lion.

[22 : 41] although the way Brexit's going, we've turned into the mouse or the hyena because everybody's laughing at us. Spain, the bull, America, the spread eagle, all creatures that are ravenous eaters and tearers of flesh.

Only God and only God's kingdom would dare to use as its symbol of might, not the line for which John looked, but alarm.

And a lamb that looks as if it's been slain. I think it's 18 times in the book of Revelation that it mentions the lamb. John's unapologetic about this.

Now, though the lamb John sees looks as though it's been slain, as he continues looking, he sees that this lamb is very much alive. In fact, as the revelation to John goes on, he will see that all of heaven's activity, all of heaven's focus, it centers around this living lamb.

We see this in verse 6, where the lamb's not lying broken, rather, he stands in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the 24 elders.

[23 : 58] Also, verse 6, this lamb has seven horns, symbolizing perfect strength, and seven eyes, symbolizing perfect knowledge and sight of everything that's going on in creation, including everything that's going on in Glasgow tonight.

You don't think Jesus knows about your life? Get real. He knows it better than you know it. He sees everything, these seven eyes, perfect knowledge, perfect sight, he sees the lot.

But, the combination of thoughts here concerning heaven's lamb is that this is both creation's ultimate self giver and creation's ultimate source of all power and strength.

And who is this lamb? What's his name? Well, I'm sure I don't need to tell you. I don't need to tell you that John's gaze and our gaze tonight has been fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The focus of God's word, the focus of God's salvation, the focus of God's heaven. As lion of Judah, root of David, as lamb of God who takes away the son of the world, Jesus alone is worthy to break open the seals of the scroll in God's right hand and Jesus alone reveals and implements God's plan of salvation and judgment for man.

[25 : 25] And here's the reason why all of us in here need Jesus. Life doesn't make sense without Jesus. What, are you going to try and work out the plans of everything yourself?

We can hardly plan for one month to the next. Never mind how everything in creation is going to fall into place. We need Jesus because he alone, he alone is worthy.

Look at verse 7. We're told it is the worthy one, Jesus, takes the scroll from the right hand of him seated in the throne. Note the next words that the one in the throne is happy for him to receive it.

In other words, there's this perfect harmony between the will of the father and son. The father is always pleased with the son and he always gives the son what he comes for, which is a great consolation for us when we know the son intercedes for us.

The father's always here in the son. No one except Jesus could or would have dared to come to the father and take this scroll from his hand and no one else would have received it.

[26 : 37] And heaven's response after he takes it, look at verse 8. There's this eruption of worship and praise. the four living creatures and the 24 elders, they fall down before the lamb.

It's like a charismatic service. There's obviously no many Presbyterians involved in this. But they're falling down. They're worshipping Jesus.

And each are holding a harp and golden bowls of incense, the prayers of the saints, and we're told that they sing a new song and what a song it is. Imagine John as he's watching us.

Remember he's just been broken before this. And now he's hearing this song. Worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God.

People from every tribe and language and people and nation and friends. Here we all are. Is this not what we're seeing tonight? We have Iranians.

[27 : 46] We have Andrew, we have Big Richard, Americans. We have Glaswegians like myself and Terry McCutcheon.

I don't know where he is, but he'll be here. Me and Terry are involved. There's even English people in here. The grace of God.

But I love this. People from every tribe and language and people and nation and they're all included around this throne and the whole focus is on Jesus Christ.

Now I'm sure I don't need to tell you in the Old Testament, a new song was sung to celebrate God's victory over enemies. Therefore, the new song of praise to Jesus here in verse 9 is highlighting Jesus' victory over all the powers of evil and sin.

The very thing that we're here celebrating tonight on Easter Sunday, that Jesus, Jesus' victory over his enemies of sin, Satan, and death.

[28 : 53] Easter Sunday. We have a new baby at home. She was born in December and last night I'm holding her and she's fallen asleep and I didn't move so I'm thinking about things.

and I started to think about the tomb that Jesus was in and what it must have been like when he breathed again on Resurrection Sunday.

The atmosphere. What did it sound like? I was getting excited. I'd never thought about that before. What was the atmosphere? Was there a wee mouse or a spider that knows this is the creator and the wee mouse and spiders maybe getting excited but he's alive.

The very thing that we are here to celebrate and we should be the happiest people in the world. Our king was dead but he is alive again. And it's important when reading Revelation 5 to keep in mind who John's writing to in the first instance.

I'm sure you know the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 and they're already in or about to go through a period of intense persecution. Well John's words would encourage believers in these churches that although they feel they are being overpowered and overcome just as a lamb would feel when it was being slain because of their identity with this lamb they were always and only ever could be on the victory side.

[30 : 31] And friends that's something we need to encourage ourselves about as well isn't it? some of us here will be going through terrible trials family trials that we can never speak about in church.

It's too painful. Church trials health trials some of us will be going through trials with sin.

We don't like talking about these things in church. We're all going through that door and we're all super apostles. we don't go through trials. We've all got trials. And all of these trials make us feel less than victorious.

All of which make us feel that we're being overpowered and overcome. Is that how we feel as Christians often? Well John wants us to see that if we are in Christ, if we are trusting and looking to the lamb who is saviour and lord, we are victorious.

Christian brothers and sisters, you are victorious. And a new song of praise for Jesus is your song because of what Jesus has done for you.

[31 : 42] So the gates of hell might be unleashed against us, but we look at Revelation 5 and we see beyond the gates of hell. Rather, we see a lamb. A lamb who is also the lion, who alone is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals and in doing so, all God's promises for us because come yes and amen.

Every single promise of God, if you're trusting in Jesus, it's yes and amen. It only could be. The lamb's saving work on our behalf, it's created a situation where nothing in creation can prevent us from singing a new song of praise.

And what encouragement that is for Christians who struggle, like those in Sri Lanka. what encouragement for Christians who suffer to be reminded in verses 9 and 10 that this lamb who rules and reigns was willingly slain for us, so that by his blood we might be ransomed.

Make it personal. I love those words. By your blood you ransomed people for God. In other words, by the blood of Christ, the flaming sword, the garden Eden that's been put down, welcome back into paradise.

By the blood of Christ, the gate to Eden, it's been reopened. Sin evicts humanity, scatters us, the blood of Jesus takes us back in, gathers us, the gathering, here we are.

[33 : 19] And in verse 10 we learn that the blood of Christ redeems us for a specific purpose. It's not just to come to church, it's to serve our God and to reign on earth.

It's easy to miss but this again is Eden language. For in the beginning man was made to serve God and to reign as God's prince on earth. So John is teaching us in and through the blood of Jesus God's original purposes for humanity and Jesus they are restored.

And for that reason Jesus is to be praised. He alone is worthy. And I want us to note praise is a theme for the rest of the chapter.

Praise erupts. It breaks forth for Jesus the King. Verse 11 with all the angels joining in. Thousands and thousands of angels praise and worshipping and honouring Jesus' worthiness.

Verse 13 every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and the sea and all that is in them or as the psalmist puts it let everything that has breath let it stop what it's doing and praise Jesus for his worthiness and revealing and implementing God's plan for salvation and judgment that's contained in the scroll.

[34 : 36] If you're like me you look at Revelation and at first glance it can be quite confusing isn't it? It's all complex pictures of lions and lambs and angels and elders and seals of a scroll and a throne and all the rest of it and we think oh I'm going back into the epistles.

However when we put all of these things together and we draw pictures from a variety of Old Testament themes we discover Revelation 5 is simply declaring the good news of the gospel that Jesus Christ is Lord victorious.

By dying, rising and ascending Jesus is the one person in history with authority and power to implement God's purposes for God's world. And friends let us not forget why Jesus has done this.

Because he loves his father. And he loves you. Do you believe Jesus loves you? We sing about the deep, deep love of Jesus and yet we're terrified to go further than ankle deep.

Here is love vast as an ocean but we treat it almost like it's a puddle. In love. He gave his blood so that people like you and me and countless billions throughout the ages from every tribe and language, people and nation can serve God and reign on earth with Jesus and a new creation.

[36 : 05] What comfort this must have been for John's first readers entering in that period of persecution. What comfort for Joni Erickson who this side of eternity will always be weak and broken.

What comfort for grieving parents in Whitehaven and what comfort for anyone here tonight who thinks life is falling apart and it seems that God isn't in control.

Well John's revelation reminds and encourages us that God is very much in control. Therefore we will keep going with Jesus till the end. John's revelation reminds and encourages us that what we may have to endure for Jesus is nothing compared with what he's already endured for us.

The majestic lion willingly became the meek lamb. I love how Augustine put it, he endured death as a lamb. He devoured death as a lion. He is the lamb and the lion because in being slew he slew death.

And John's revelation reminds and encourages us that come what may even death itself as God's people we will always, always, always have a new song of praise in our mouths and we will reign with Jesus in glory for ever and ever and ever.

[37 : 24] Isn't it exciting being a Christian? And so with the four living creatures in verse 14 we'll end tonight as well by saying Lord when we hear this, Amen.

Amen. Let it be so Lord. Let it be so for me. And with the 24 elders we too want to fall down and worship Jesus who alone is worthy.

Let me pray. Lord Jesus we worship and we praise you this evening.

What a privilege, a big crowd of people in Glasgow from every tribe and tongue and language and nation. And here we all are Lord, ransomed by your blood.

And we along with the whole host of heaven and this wonderful vision John sees, we too can say worthy is him who was slain. Worthy are you Lord Jesus.

[38 : 30] Lord I pray that if there be anybody here tonight who doesn't know you, that you would make yourself known to them and before they leave this building they would be on their knees saying Amen.

And saying worthy of you Lord Jesus. Lord make these things real in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. Lord help us to be excited as your people when we read these things.

Help us to see that we are included in this. Lord we thank you for your word, we thank you that it speaks and we trust that you will continue speaking to us for the rest of this evening.

Indeed until Christ comes back in whose name we pray. Amen.