

Sermon Draft

Text: Revelation 5:(1–7) 8–14

Sermon: “Visions”

The revelation of Jesus deepens as John is ushered into the holy presence of God. In this throne room there is reverence and awe: God is worshiped day and night. As our text opens, there is a sealed scroll in God’s hand; the suspense builds as the question is asked: Who is worthy to take the scroll and open it? No one is worthy but the Lion of Judah; the Lion is the Lamb, the one who looked *“as though it had been slain”* (v 6). He is worthy. The content of the letter reveals judgment and salvation. Honor is due him who is both powerful (Lion) and merciful to the point of sacrifice (Lamb): Jesus Christ.

In our text John was having a vision, he was getting a glimpse of heaven. We are sometimes blessed to see visions of grandeur here on earth. No doubt you can think of moments you were so caught up you could scarcely breathe, perhaps a view of nature, like the Grand Tetons or the great vistas of Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon.

For some, it might be the view of a beautiful building, some architectural masterpiece.

For others watching a talented dancer move about the dance floor or closing one's eyes and listening to our favorite music can take us to a special place. But then the reality of life upon this earth comes crashing in.

Majesty is what we see today as we read from the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the apostle John. In this vision, we are caught up with John into heaven; we see what he sees. He sees God at the center and the Lamb and the Spirit of God in power. He sees the elders around the throne falling down in worship to the Lamb. He sees the thousands upon thousands of angels, singing their strong anthem of praise. He sees all of heaven and earth giving worship to the Lamb and to our God. It's a vision that would have our hairs standing straight, viewing the majesty of our Lord in heaven.

But, as awesome as the vision is, the message in and around this vision is not about God's power and might and the adoration and praise that properly belong to him.

The message is what God has done and what he promises always to do for you and for me. The vision of the Lord is Majestic, but the message is transforming!

The action focuses on God. In his hand is a large book, or scroll, sealed with seven seals, the contents of which are a mystery. This book is bursting with information, almost screaming for release. ***“Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?”*** (v 2) Nothing in all of heaven or earth is able, not even an angel. John would weep, but an elder knows! There is one who is able: the Lion of Judah, the Root of Jesse! And, looking, John sees a Lamb! A Lamb that looks ***“as though it had been slain”*** (v 6). The Lamb is strong and victorious. As the Lamb stands before the throne of God, the praise commences from the elders gathered round the throne, from angels, from all of heaven and earth.

It's all about Jesus, the Lamb. Remember the words of John the Baptist, who prophesied about Jesus: "***Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!***" (John 1:29).

When we read about this Lamb who looked "***as though it had been slain,***" our thoughts take us to the Lamb, Jesus, who went to Calvary and was, in fact, slain on the cross; we remember that this is the same Jesus who could not be contained within the grave. The Holy One of God who brings life cannot be contained in death. He was raised up on the third day. This is the one who stands before the very throne of God.

This Lamb, however, has unusual features: this Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes! As bizarre as that Lamb would look, understand what is symbolized: the horns are symbols of strength; the eyes are of knowledge and wisdom. Seven is the symbol of God's perfect holiness and power. This Lamb has the fullness of God's strength, the fullness of God's knowledge and wisdom; further, the Spirit of God proceeds from this Lamb and goes out into all the world.

This Lamb is not only the Lamb *of* God; it is the Lamb who *is* God. If we ever hesitate in the claim that “Jesus is God” or become shaky about the Church’s teaching of the Trinity, we can look back to this passage.

Jesus oozes God; everything he was on earth was covered over in our human form. Now, remember how Jesus was described by Paul in his Letter to the Philippians: Jesus, though he was God, humbled himself to come down to us. He clothes himself in our form, takes on our likeness, as a human; true God becomes true man. Jesus’ goal is to die for us, even a painful death on the cross—for one purpose: to die as the payment price for our sins. (“Lamb that was slain.”)

But, having achieved all this, Jesus is exalted to the highest place; he returns to the throne he came from, interceding for us as our Savior. His blood atones for our sins, and for his sake, our prayers are heard. All this he will do until the time when he comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead and to bring about a new heaven and earth, “*the home of righteousness.*” Jesus receives all glory and honor.

But notice that the Lamb *keeps* the marks of his death. Why? If he is exalted, why can we not let loose of this whole painful ordeal? Because these marks of his death are also marks of his victory.

These marks bear the purpose of Jesus, the plan of salvation, and the promise for you and for me. It is a *living* Lamb who is praised, who had been slain to undo the effects of sin. Notice that as the songs go forward for Jesus, everything that is said about God is said about Jesus: worthy is the Lamb who was slain . . . whose blood purchased men for God. Or, as we Christians sing: ***“Whose blood set us free to be people of God!”***

The glory, the beauty and majesty of this moment is nothing without the message for you and me: we have hope in this world and always because of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything about our lives. In our First Reading today, Saul was transformed from persecutor of the Church to servant of the Gospel. In the Gospel, Peter was forgiven and restored.

That is God's intent; this vision reminds us that God's holiness is awesome, but greater yet is God's power and desire to destroy the power of sin, death, and the devil. Our message is not so much "God is great" or just that "Jesus is Lord."

Luther reminds us that **"Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord"** (explanation of the Second Article).

The power and worthiness of God is one thing, but it's a majestic thing when received by faith, as the true gift from God's Holy Spirit, for you and for me!

That's the revelation God wants us to see not just the power and majesty of heaven; not merely that Jesus is victorious and worthy of all; but that all of this is ours. God transforms us in a powerful, though simple, way. His Holy Spirit comes to us in Baptism; God cleanses us of our sins and changes us, redeems us to be his own. His name is placed on us, and he directs us through life with his power and strength.

God feeds us in the Word and in the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. What a revelation of God's love and power and purpose and promise to each of us. In Jesus' name.

Amen