

Glory to God the Redeemer

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- [0 : 0 0] There's a famous sociologist, his name is Zygmunt Bauman. He actually passed away a couple of years ago, I think. He was a professor at Leeds University for a long time.
- He was one of the top people in his field. He won various, countless awards for his study of social science. Really trying to understand, I suppose, how society operates.
- What is it that makes us tick? Where are we heading? What are the trends that we see in the people and in the groups of people around us? And he has this one fascinating interview.
- He says this, imagine you're on a plane in midair. You're sitting comfortably, reading, drinking, watching, when suddenly it becomes apparent that this plane has no pilot.
- This plane has no crew. There's no one to fly this plane. He goes on a bit more and then his conclusion is to say, it's a frightening image, really, which I think is a bit of an understatement there.
- [0 : 5 9] But his point that he comes to at the end is his point is that that is more and more how people in our society feel. And he finishes with this. He says this, no one is in control.
- That is the major source of contemporary fear. No one is in control. That is the major source of contemporary fear. Those were the results of his studying, of his social sciences, looking at the world around him and what people thought and how people were living.
- And we spoke about that last week. We live in a world that is full of change and uncertainty at every level. And the worry is, well, there's no one overseeing that change. That actually we're on our own.
- And the great good news that we saw in Revelation chapter 4 was that actually God is seated on his heavenly throne. That actually God is in control of everything.
- And it's knowing him. It's knowing his control. It's having a relationship with him which actually drives out fear. The fear that kind of surrounds us.
- [2 : 0 7] The fear that we're all tempted towards. It's the knowledge of God that gets rid of that fear and can actually bring us security in our day-to-day lives. Now, we move into Revelation chapter 5.
- And I say these are kind of a pair of verses that are designed to go together. And we're looking at the same kind of scene. We're still in this heavenly throne room. And the passage begins almost by revisiting and asking again that huge question.
- Really, I suppose the question we could say that defines how we see life, how we approach life. That defines our worldview. That question, is anyone in control?
- Is there a plan? Is there a destination for us as individuals? Or for the whole of this universe that we live in? And Revelation chapter 5 forms a pair with chapter 4.
- Because here the focus zooms in from kind of God as a whole, as we saw last week. God as creator. To more specifically, the work of Christ as redeemer.

[3 : 11] The work of Christ as rescuer. Now, we see in this chapter not just that there is a plan. But that we see how this plan is worked out. And we see most of all that the very center of this plan, the very center of history really, is Jesus Christ.

So let's have a look. Let's dig in to that. And we'll begin again by asking, I suppose, that same question. Who's in control? Well, let me read the first four verses of this chapter. Then I saw in the right hand of him who is seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back sealed with seven seals.

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 and look into it.

And I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look into it. I remember in the book of Revelation, we are dealing with a lot of imagery.

It's written with a lot of kind of symbolism and metaphors, things like that. And it can sometimes make kind of reading it seem a little bit daunting. Sometimes you might have heard it read and you think that sounds a bit weird.

[4 : 27] What on earth is that talking about? But actually, the kind of the message in the book of Revelation can be quite straightforward if we can just get what these symbols are talking about.

And a big focus of this chapter is this scroll. A scroll which is written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. So what is this scroll?

Well, really, it represents the whole of history, the past and the future. And specifically, it's God's plan of all that he is going to do with his creation.

You notice it's written on the front and the back. The idea is completely full. There's no more to be added. It's complete. This is not just kind of what's happened up until now. It is God's plan for eternity.

And yet the tension, the problem at the beginning of this chapter is what? It's that this scroll is sealed up. It's a closed book. That actually nobody knows where things are heading.

[5 : 30] Nobody knows the end point. How is this plan going to be carried out? So when the angel asks, verse 2, who is worthy to open the scroll, to break its seals, really the question is, well, is this plan going to happen?

Is there any point to this grand plan? Is anyone actually able to carry it out? And at first, it seems the answer is no, doesn't it? No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and look into it.

And John's response, he says, he began to weep loudly. Well, we might think it's not a very kind of manly, it's not a very brave response. Pull yourself together, John. Well, actually, it's an entirely appropriate response.

Imagine you're stranded on a desert island and somebody says, guys, good news, I've got these plans. I've got these blueprints for a rescue boat that could take us all home. You say, oh, brilliant.

Can anyone make sense of these plans? Have we got any engineers who can read these blueprints? Can someone make this boat? Suddenly, everyone kind of looks down at their feet and there's a resounding no.

[6 : 35] You'd be gutted, wouldn't you? These plans, this kind of hope that you have, actually, it's useless. These are not going to help. Well, John has just been told the same, but the plan for the whole of history, the plan for the whole of our future, our very existence is here, but no one can open it.

It's essentially meaningless. No one can do it. No one's in control. And the result is that we'll just be victims of a kind of endless sequence of chance events. There's no real destination.

God has no plan, or at least he has a plan, but it's unable to be opened, unable to be carried out. It's pointless. And John weeps. He's distraught. And yet, actually, this is the view of a world without God.

This is the view of a world that is so vigorously promoted today, actually. A few years ago, there was an advertising campaign where people paid to put the slogan on buses, there's probably no God.

Now, stop worrying and enjoy your life. And the idea there is pretty clear, isn't there? That if there is a God, well, that would make life a worrying place, and that would be something that would take all the fun out of life.

[7 : 45] Wouldn't it be great if there wasn't a God? Well, see, John's response here is the total opposite. That if there's no God, if God's plan can't be unraveled and unfolded, well, then there's no hope.

It's despair. That wickedness will not be punished. That justice will not be done. A better future will not be established.

If there's no God and there's no plan, then there's nothing to look forward to. It's just more of the same. Personally, I think it's incredible how in the world that we live in, the world where we see so much wrong, even in our own fairly kind of comfortable, privileged Western country, it's amazing that people can try and claim that actually having no God, there being no plan, there being nothing more than this is somehow good news, can somehow be a message of hope and joy.

It's actually a view that is kind of blind to the problems that real people have in a real world. There's no good news without God. In a world where this scroll is sealed, where God's plan can't be carried out, just like God, it should cause us to weep because it's hopeless.

It's despair. And yet, thankfully, after this pause, once again, the book of Revelation reveals to us the true picture. It's not a picture of despair.

[9 : 10] It's not a picture of hopelessness. There is a definite answer to the question, is anyone in control? And it is a resounding yes. Verse 5, as John is weeping, as he thinks, No one can open this scroll.

We read this, One of the elders said to me, Weep no more. Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of Jesse, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.

There is one who can open this scroll, who can carry out this plan, and it's Jesus. The titles used here are from the Old Testament, The Lion of the tribe of Judah.

That goes right back to Genesis, the very first book of the Bible. And at the end of that book, we're told that there will be a rescuer who will come from the tribe of Judah. The Root of David is a quotation from Isaiah, one of the prophets, again, way before Jesus, but who says that it will be one of King David's descendants who will be the true king, who will truly deliver his people.

And it's Jesus who's the fulfillment of these titles. He was from the house of Judah. He was from the line of David. He is the one who can open this scroll. That history is under Jesus' control.

[10 : 31] He is able to carry out God's saving plan. He is the focus of God's saving plan. And from before time until the very end of eternity, he has succeeded in this plan.

And so he's the only one worthy and able to unfold it. And why is he worthy to do that? Well, the passage says it's because he has conquered.

It's because he's victorious. And because of his victory, because he's conquered, he can reveal and invite us into that perfect plan that God's laid out.

And the rest of this passage is about how Jesus is right at the center of God's plan. And about how Jesus conquering, Jesus being able to open this scroll, unfold this plan, changes everything.

And we're going to see here three things about Jesus conquering and what that means, what difference that makes. And the first thing we're showing this, as soon as we're told that Jesus has conquered and is worthy to open the scroll, we're shown how he conquered.

[11 : 37] How did he earn this right? How did he win this victory? How he conquered? And again here we get all sorts of brilliant symbolic language kind of piled up. John has been told that the one who's conquered is the Lion of Judah.

He's the descendant of the great King David. And then verse 6, John turns and he looks. I don't know what he's expecting to see, but what's standing there? He sees a lamb.

And not just any lamb, a lamb looking as though it's been slain, as if it's been killed. The lamb throughout the Bible is the symbol and was the literal animal often used in a sacrifice.

And the point is this, how is Jesus conquered? How is he worthy to open the scroll, to unfold the plan of history? Well it's because he presented himself as the ultimate sacrifice.

It is because Jesus died. And yet not only died but rose again. This lamb is standing. The idea is he's no longer dead. This lamb again is one of these symbolism things.

[12 : 40] He's got seven horns. Seven is the number of perfection. Horns are the symbol of kind of power and might. We don't think of lambs being particularly powerful. But this is a kind of a powerful, victorious picture of the lamb who died and rose again.

This is not a pathetic picture, but the lamb who through his death has conquered. And it's made even more kind of explicit down in verse 9. It is this death which is the crowning event in God's plan of salvation.

It is this death that means Jesus is able to continue to unroll this scroll. It is this death that brings hope for a plan for our universe. If Jesus hadn't died, God's plan for salvation would have kind of run up against a brick wall.

These seals would have remained unopened. It would have been that hopeless picture that we talked about, an aimless existence. But through Jesus' death, he has conquered.

And this theme of conquering is a huge theme in the book of Revelation. We mentioned last week in chapters 2 and 3 there are seven different letters to seven churches.

[13 : 59] Each one addressing different issues that they're going through. But each one finishing with a call for that church to conquer. To the one who conquers, Jesus says to the church. And the very end of the book of Revelation, chapter 21, verse 7, is the one who conquers, again, who God says will be his son.

This idea of Christians being people who conquer is a big idea. And we see perhaps here, maybe more clearly than anywhere else, actually, what does that conquering mean? Because it's not a kind of a triumphalistic, oh, we've got it all sorted.

It's not a triumphalistic, you know, we've conquered evil, we've done it. It's not the kind of, you know, this church is going to blow your socks off because we're so incredible and we can do everything. It's not a, no more problems for us, we've got to pass from any kind of struggles or illness or challenges that are going to come.

We've conquered. No, our conquering is only possible because Christ first conquered it. And how did he conquer? It was through this faithful suffering.

It was through this sacrifice in our place. And our conquering, that the church is conquering, it follows that same pattern. It is faithfully persisting in putting our trust fully in Jesus Christ, even in the face of suffering.

[15 : 20] Even in the face of challenge. Even in the face of opposition. God's conquerors, those who stick with him, will frequently not look that victorious as the world defines victory or success.

And they are not people who've achieved a kind of a higher plane of existence and moved beyond the problems and the struggles of ordinary people. And we see that throughout the Bible.

We see people like the Apostle Paul. We see even Jesus himself, whose earthly life, in so many ways, did not look that impressive. Was not the story you would have written of a successful man.

But on the final day, those who have conquered, those who've remained faithful to Jesus, have trusted in him and in him alone, will be revealed to be truly victorious with him.

Again, this is a point of huge significance to the original readers of the book of Revelation. Remember, this was written to a church who were suffering. A church, or various churches, who were going through hard times.

[16 : 27] It's a letter and a lesson for us too today in the church. An encouragement to hold fast, even in difficult situations. Don't let go of Jesus to go after something else, whatever the cost.

Because it is through holding on to Jesus and him holding on to us that we conquer. And how do we know that? Well, because that is how Jesus, the true conqueror, conquered first.

And our victory is not in our strength or what we do, but it is in him and what he has done as the center of this plan. And that is how he conquered. So we see that Jesus, the lamb, conquered through his death.

That's why he's able to unfold this plan of salvation. The next thing that we see in this passage is the purpose of that. Why did he conquer? Really, what's the end goal of this plan, which Jesus' death is right at the center of, which Jesus' sacrifice unlocks these seals of?

And we're told this by those who are gathered round the throne. As we read in verses 8 and 9, that they sing a new song. And here are the words. Worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals, for you are slain.

[17 : 39] 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.

And see here in these verses, the heart of this plan, which Jesus is able to unfold, is that it's a plan of redemption.

That by his blood he ransomed people. The ransom is the price that you pay, isn't it? In order that one might go free. You see that in all sorts of films. Money demanded for the safe return of a loved one.

And if that price is paid, well then the person is freed. Well it's not money, but it's through his blood, through his death, that Jesus has freed people. That he has delivered people.

He's paid the ultimate price. And get this, it's really important that people aren't free just to kind of go and do their own thing. They're not just sort of sent away to go wherever they want.

[18 : 41] By his blood it says he ransomed people for God. Those who are freed by Jesus' death in their place become God's people. That's the purpose in Jesus' conquering.

That is the point of this whole plan of salvation that runs through the Bible. God is gathering to himself a special people. They will be my people and I will be their God.

That theme that runs through the whole of the Bible. Remember when we look through the book of Exodus. That incredible rescue from Egypt, but from slavery in Egypt to being God's people in the promised land.

God is making a people for himself. And in case we forget how big the scope of that is. In case we start to think, oh no wonder God would be very interested in people like me.

Because I'm fairly great. And we're reminded that's not the case. It's not about who we are. It's not a particular sort of person that God's chosen. Instead it's those from every tribe and language and people and nation.

[19 : 47] That is what Jesus came to do. Those are the people who are in God's kingdom. And we live in quite an individualistic society really in the West.

The kind of the self as an individual being is very well defined. And if we lived in an Eastern culture we'd be much more defined by our relationships with other people. Our family or other groups that we're in.

Both of those have got pros and cons. But the danger is if our way can sometimes limit us seeing just how great God's plan is. And so we might say, well why did Jesus die?

Well he died to save you. He died to rescue me. And that's true. But actually we might miss that it is bigger than that. Why did Jesus die? He died to make a kingdom.

He died to redeem a whole body of people. That is what we're brought into. A kingdom of people who we see here are priests to God. That means people who have this direct access to God.

[20 : 49] A kingdom of people who will reign here on earth. Again who aren't simply looking forward to kind of floating around on the clouds in heaven. But are looking forward to a new creation.

A new creation. Where God's people will reign with him. And the incredible thing really. This is an incredible kind of picture of the future. Of what's to come. But the incredible thing is that the church is an image of that here and now.

The church is God's redeemed people. The church is that collective that Jesus is bringing together. The church has access to God through his word, the Bible, through the Holy Spirit.

Because of what Jesus has done. The church is supposed to be almost a black and white sketch. Of what one day we will see in glorious technicolor.

And the idea there is that as we live as God's people now in this world. As we live out that relationship and access we have to him through Jesus. Through his victory, his conquering.

[21 : 49] As we live as redeemed people. People of his kingdom. People whose defining characteristic is not our race or nationality. Or wealth or social class or career.

Or family status. Or any of the other ways that people tend to define themselves. But a collective of people whose defining characteristic is that they're God's people.

That they're followers of Jesus. That they're redeemed by Jesus. The idea is as we try in our kind of humble and flawed ways to live that out now. That we are that sketch that would show the world around us.

That just a glimpse of the hope and the joy that comes. And which is offered for all eternity. If we trust in the conquering Lord Jesus. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian.

Perhaps you're still wondering about all this stuff. Thinking it through. Perhaps you've come willingly this morning. Perhaps you've been kind of dragged along. Really our prayer would be that you'd be able to see just a glimpse of Jesus.

[22 : 49] And what he's done. So that we can be his people. We can join this kingdom of priests. And just how encouraging and joyful and attractive that invitation he has made possible.

And that invitation he holds out is. All of us in this room are far, far from being perfect people. We're far, far from being a perfect church. But the point is we're not asking people to put our trust in us.

But to put our trust in the one who conquered in Jesus. Who will one day make everything perfect again. And the great thing that he achieved. Why did he conquer? Was so that when this new creation comes.

When perfection is restored. That God will have a people there to worship him. And to live for him. That he will be their God. And they will be his people.

That is the ultimate destination of this plan. And that is that we get to see a picture of that. Just a glimpse of that in the church here and now. So there we go.

[23 : 49] How he conquered. Why he conquered. Finally, very briefly. What is the response to the conqueror? What response do we see to the conquering lamb? To the one who has ransomed a kingdom of priests before God?

Well really this is simply what we see from verse 11 down to the end. And it is worship. A worship of God. And a worship that brings confidence. As in so many ways the big idea of this chapter, chapter 5.

Is kind of the same as what we saw last week in chapter 4. In fact it's almost like the entire book of Revelation. Is one of those kind of sticks of Blackpool Rock. It has loads of different things going on.

But wherever you cut it. It reveals that same key message. Have confidence and worship God. Have confidence even in hard times. Remember Revelation.

A letter written to suffering churches. And yet churches who can have confidence. Because the lamb has conquered. Jesus has died and risen again.

[24 : 51] God's people are secure in his hands. And no one can ever take that away. That what Jesus has ransomed remains God's property forever. He has won victory even over death itself.

And so we can have that great confidence. That whatever the world might throw at us as individuals. The pressure we might feel as a church. The opposition that might come. And that will come.

That whatever the world throws at us. We have confidence that through Jesus we have something greater. That we have conquered. Not in our own strength.

But through him. That we have victory. Not in our own strength. But through him. That in him we have something the world could never take away. Something that is better than anything the world can offer.

That through Christ. Through his victory. Through his position at the center of God's eternal plan of redemption. In that direction. We are able to say that we are God's people. And that he is our God.

[25 : 50] And that invitation to become God's people. And to have him as our God. Is something we are able to offer to those around us. If they would come to know Jesus who conquers. And it is from that confidence in what Jesus has done.

That our worship to him flows. That we worship him as our redeemer. Our rescuer. We worship him as we come together like this on a Sunday. We worship him as we scatter.

And live out our lives day to day. In different places. In different situations. We worship him because of Jesus' fulfillment of this plan of God. Because of his control over history.

And as we do that. We join in now with the heavenly angels who worship God. And we anticipate the future. When we will join in worship with him for eternity.

As his people in the perfection of the new creation. Let me read again these closing verses. Worthy is the lamb who was slain. To receive power and wealth and wisdom and might.

[26 : 50] 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 worshiped.

God has a plan for his creation. Jesus is the center of that plan. Through his death and resurrection. Jesus has conquered. He has been victorious.

And through that he has rescued us. To be a people for God. And so we worship him. Let me pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.