

Revelation: The Triumph of the Lamb
The Beauty of Jesus and the Plan of God
Revelation 1:5-6

Text:

Revelation 1:4-8 (ESV)

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. ⁸ **“I am the Alpha and the Omega,”** says the Lord God, **“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”**

Introduction:

Ever since we changed our format for the Lord’s Supper about five or six years ago, I have been reading my Bible with a certain question always at the forefront of my mind. I want to know what Christ *actually* accomplished. I want to see the passages that spell out for me exactly what the cross did.

Reading the Bible, especially the NT, in this way has had a two-fold effect on me. First, it has taken the work of Christ out of the realm of the theoretical and moved it into the realm of the actual. What I mean by that is that for so many years of life, I always thought of the cross-work of Christ as being a theoretical work, a work that did not actually accomplish anything but simply opened the door for good things to be possible. Jesus’ death made it possible for individuals to be saved if they so choose. I thought of the cross-work in terms of God having done his part and now it is up to mankind to do his part. The cross did not actually save anyone; it just made salvation a theoretical possibility. If any man wants to now choose faith in Christ, the door is open.

But in reading the Bible with this question on my mind of what the cross-work of Christ actually accomplished, I have come across several passages that blow the work out of the realm of theoretical and squarely place it in the realm of the actual. Jesus’ death did far more than simply make salvation possible, he made it actual.

The second effect that reading the Bible in this way has had upon me is that it has made Jesus more beautiful and the plan of God more visible. That is, it has heightened the worship of an all-loving and all-wise God.

As you can imagine, the shift from viewing the cross as a theoretical work to an actual work has provided a major shift in my theological grid. God was not about the preservation of human free will when he sent Christ to the cross. God was not just doing his part so that man could then do his part. No, God was actually accomplishing and applying the redemption necessary for there to be a people to worship and praise him throughout all eternity. Jesus went to the cross with a chosen people in mind. Jesus went to the cross with the names of a chosen people written on his heart and

graven on his hands. Jesus' wounds were their wounds; Jesus' death was their death; Jesus' blood was purchasing their freedom; Jesus' resurrection was their resurrection. God's chosen people were united with Christ in his life, death and resurrection and this uniting of Christ and his people was from eternity past. God had a plan for a people and Jesus beautifully obeyed his Father to the point of death so that believers could be loved by Christ and made into God-worshippers.

So reading the Bible in this way means that when I come to passages of Scripture like this one, I don't want to gloss over it as though we are in a hurry to get on to the next section. It means I want to linger over it and tease out every possible drop of truth that might be more fuel in my fire of worship. Jesus Christ went to the cross to actually accomplish my redemption.

Look at the way John says it at the end of v.5. He is breaking out into a praise chorus, a doxology, when he says, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Jesus was carrying out the plan of God that had purposed for their to be a people that might serve as a kingdom and priests before him forever and ever; and Jesus is demonstrated to be loving and praiseworthy – truly beautiful. Reading the Bible with an eye for texts like this makes Jesus beautiful and the plan of God more visible.

Turn with me to the book of Titus and there we can see how Paul put it:

Titus 2:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ [We are] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

God has always had a plan for a people. Jesus came to purchase for himself a people. Jesus came to set us free by his blood and make us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father. The cross-work of Jesus was the means – it was by his blood – God used in purchasing and establishing a people. That was his plan from the beginning and the book of Revelation sees into the future and looks at the consummation.

John is really setting us up here for themes that will be developed in much greater detail later on in the book. In chapter 5, John will see in a vision the very throne room of God and the Lamb slain. Once the Lamb takes the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fall down to worship the Lamb and notice the lyrics of the song they sing:

Revelation 5:9-10 (ESV)

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."

You can see the plan of God and the beauty of Jesus can't you?

When John says that it was by the blood of Jesus that we were made into a kingdom of priests to his God and Father, there is something very peculiar that should raise a question. To be made into a kingdom and priests sounds very Jewish. But we know that he has in mind more than just Israel. He has every language, tribe, tongue and nation in view. More than that, when he says in v.5 that he made *us* a kingdom of priests, we know that he means to include the seven churches of Asia along with him. Look at v.9, "I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the

kingdom...” This is a kingdom comprised of both Jew and Gentile. It is far broader than just a Jewish kingdom. It entails more than Israel.

And I submit to you this morning that this very fact is the plan of God made visible in the book of Revelation. The blood of Jesus accomplished the plan and purpose of God for purchasing a people from every language, tribe, tongue and nation and that this was his plan all along from the beginning.

Do you remember what God said to Abraham when he called him out from the Ur of the Chaldeans? God said,

Genesis 12:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make *of you a great nation*, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*”

Even in establishing a covenant with Abraham that he would make of him a great nation, God always had all the nations in view. Go forward a bit more to...

Genesis 17:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of *a multitude of nations*. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of *a multitude of nations*.

Finally, the day came when Abraham received from God his own son, Isaac. And you remember the test that God put Abraham through. He was commanded to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. The story is recorded in Genesis 21 and 22. Abraham obeyed God and got as far as raising the knife over his head before God stopped him. Look at what God says in...

Genesis 22:15-18 (ESV)

¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and *in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Abraham was going to be given a son who would be made into a great nation and this son would then become the means by which all the families of the earth would be blessed. Now it would appear that this son is Isaac through whom comes the nation of Israel.

God told Abraham in Genesis 15 that his offspring would wander in a land that is not theirs and that they will be afflicted for four hundred years before God will judge the oppressive nation, lead them out with great wealth and give them possession of the land promised. You know the story. God was predicting the years of Joseph and being brought into Egypt where for four hundred years the Hebrew people suffered under bondage until the days of Moses.

Immediately following the Exodus from Egypt, God assembles all the people around Mt. Sinai where he delivers the conditions of his covenant. If they will agree to keep all his commands, then they will be his covenant nation – his chosen people. Notice his words in Exodus 19.

Exodus 19:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, **if** you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Israel was birthed into that great nation promised to Abraham. In Genesis 24 they agree to the conditions of the covenant and the covenant is made with them as a nation. They were a treasured people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Does that sound familiar?

Here is where we must not get distracted. If all we had was the OT Scriptures then we would assume that all was fulfilled in God's promise to Abraham with the birth of Isaac. But the NT Scriptures make it abundantly clear that Isaac was not the son God had in mind; Isaac was not the offspring who would be a blessing to the nations.

Go with me to Peter's sermon in Acts 3. This is a sermon being preaching in the Temple following the healing of a lame beggar.

Acts 3:17-26 (ESV)

¹⁷ “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. ²² Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. ²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ ²⁴ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵ You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘**And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.**’ ²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

Peter is quoting Genesis 22:18. The offspring that God had in mind was not Isaac; it was Christ. Christ is the one by whom all the families of the earth are blessed.

Notice how Paul says it in Galatians 3.

Galatians 3:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Paul quotes Genesis 12:3. The gospel of sins forgiven was preached to Abraham because God knew that salvation was going to come to every nation. God had far more in mind when he made

his covenant with Abraham than simply Israel. The people that God set out to establish through Abraham always included more than Israel.

Galatians 3:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:28-29 (ESV)

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

The promise that God made to Abraham was about building a great nation, about purchasing a people for his own possession. The NT makes it clear that that people has nothing to do with a physical connection to Abraham but with a spiritual connection. “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” The nation, the land, the son were always far broader than a mere physical reality. They were always part of an eternal purpose of God to bring about a spiritual reality.

Peter and John, then, in one accord say the same thing. First, Peter...

1 Peter 2:4-10 (ESV)

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices [as opposed to physical sacrifices] acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” ⁸ and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They [physical Israel] stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. ⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession*, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

We could go to Ephesians 2 and see how Paul chimes in, but let’s return to Revelation 1 and listen to John.

Revelation 1:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ ...To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 5:9-14 (ESV)

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!” ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

When you understand what the cross-work of Jesus actually accomplished, you see the plan of God more clearly and you see the beauty of Christ more vividly. When you understand what the cross-work of Jesus actually accomplished, you cannot help but be moved to worship.

Oh that we may fall down and worship!