

I.N.I.

Third Sunday of Easter

April 22, 2012

Revelation 5:11-14

In Christ Jesus, the Lamb who was slain and is alive again and sits on the throne of God, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last Sunday we began a six week journey through the book of Revelation. We began with a very different picture of Jesus, a vision that symbolically showed us not what Jesus looks like, but what Jesus is. Remember the white hair, the eyes like a flame of fire, the feet like fine brass, the voice like the sound of many waters, the sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth and His face shining like the sun in its strength. The last thing we read was that Jesus commanded the Apostle John to write what he saw, to write **THE THINGS THAT ARE AND THE THINGS THAT TAKE PLACE AFTER THIS.**

This morning we are jumping to chapter 5.

In chapters 2 and 3 John wrote the words of Jesus to the seven churches in Asia Minor. In chapter 4 John is invited to view God's throne in heaven. We read 4:1 **AFTER THESE THINGS I LOOKED, AND BEHOLD, A DOOR STANDING OPEN IN HEAVEN. AND THE FIRST VOICE WHICH I HEARD WAS LIKE A TRUMPET SPEAKING WITH ME, SAYING, "COME UP HERE, AND I WILL SHOW YOU THINGS WHICH MUST TAKE PLACE AFTER THIS."**

Around God's throne were 24 other thrones, on which 24 elders were seated. In the center around the throne there were four "living creatures," covered with eyes. One creature had the appearance of a lion; the second of an ox; the third had a face like a man; and the fourth had the face of a flying eagle. Each of these "living creatures" had six wings, and they never stopped praising God. As John stood before the glassy sea and emerald-looking rainbow, he would hear some of the most powerful songs ever sung. Not only the quality of the music, but the occasion which inspired this music would make it some of the most moving music ever heard.

When John turned his attention to the figure on the middle throne, he saw a scroll which revealed what the future was to be. At first he wept in despair because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and look into it. But he was told that the Root of David was able to open it because of His triumph. Then he saw a Lamb standing on the throne, looking as if it had been slain, but now was alive again. The four living creatures and the 24 elders formed a circle around the Lamb. As the Lamb took the scroll, the living creatures and the elders fell down and sang a new song. The canopy of heaven resounded with the blessed testimony that the Lamb alone was worthy to open the scroll. He alone was worthy because He had been slain to redeem and save all of mankind and make them kings and priests. It is at this point in this special heavenly vision that our text begins. Our text records the second and third songs of the hosts of heaven.

We have entitled our theme for this morning:

A SONG OF HOPE IN A TIME OF TRIAL

The words of these songs stand as an encouragement, not only for the Christians of John's day, many of whom were being persecuted and undergoing trials because of their faith in Jesus, but also for all Christians who suffer in any way. These words would be a perfect text for a Christian funeral sermon, as we offer the blessed confident comfort of the Victory of life over death through the Triumphant Lamb for those who grieve the loss of their believing loved one.

These words would also bring welcome peace to a Christian in the hospital suffering from a serious illness. These words give us a visual picture of what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in Romans 8:18 **FOR I CONSIDER THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH THE GLORY WHICH SHALL BE REVEALED IN US.**

That glory is what we see in our text this morning, the glory of the heavenly host around the Lamb singing songs of praise and honor. It is the Church Triumphant, believers in heaven free from all suffering and pain, all sorrows and sin, from death and damnation, victorious over all enemies.

We read vs. 11-12 **THEN I LOOKED, AND I HEARD THE VOICE OF MANY ANGELS AROUND THE THRONE, THE LIVING CREATURES, AND THE ELDERS; AND THE NUMBER OF THEM WAS TEN THOUSAND TIMES TEN THOUSAND, AND THOUSANDS OF THOUSANDS, SAYING WITH A LOUD VOICE; “WORTHY IS THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN TO RECEIVE POWER AND RICHES AND WISDOM, AND STRENGTH AND HONOR AND GLORY AND BLESSING!”**

The vision that John had seen up to this point was already staggering and mind-boggling, but now begins a scene and a sound that can only be described as breathtaking. It was as if the doors of heaven were opened and John saw thousands upon thousands of angels, a countless number surrounding the Lamb. They, together with the four living creatures and the 24 elders, sing this second song of praise. What an inspiring and encouraging picture for the scattered Christians of John’s day who were facing persecutions.

They were a little flock among many, many wolves. They were insignificant to the rest of the world, yet here John sees the whole host of heaven and all the believers who will be there throughout all eternity. It is reported that only 29% of the people of the world claim to be Christians, less than one-third. Even in this so-called Christian nation of ours we are a little flock of true believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We sometimes can feel isolated and powerless. Picture this vision in your mind. A mighty throng, a multitude from every corner of the world, together with all the countless angels. WOW!

The four living creatures are believed to be symbolical of all the living beings in this world. The 24 elders are symbolical of all the Old Testament and New Testament believers. Several times in the seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor the Savior had promised the faithful Christians that they would reign with Him in glory. Even when Jesus was on this earth with His disciples, He promised that someday they would be seated on **TWELVE THRONES, JUDGING THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL** together with the **SON OF MAN WHO SITS ON THE THRONE OF HIS GLORY**. Twelve of the elders stand for the 12 tribes of Israel, symbolizing all of the Old Testament believers and the other 12 elders stand for the 12 Apostles, symbolizing all of the New Testament believers. All of these redeemed sang **A SONG OF SINS FORGIVEN AND OF THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB**.

Even as there were seven characteristics of Jesus in the vision in chapter 1 which we heard last week and even as John was directed to write to seven churches, we now hear seven accolades, seven words of praise to the Lamb. Some are very similar.

1 & 2. POWER AND STRENGTH: In His state of Exaltation, Christ again took up the almighty power that He had before the world was created, the power that He laid aside when He became a human being. This is the power of almighty God, the power of the Word, the power of the Lord of lords and King of kings. **The power of the One who not only gives life, but is LIFE!** Jesus said to His disciples just prior to His Ascension, **ALL AUTHORITY (POWER)**

HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH.

3. RICHES: This is a reference to all things in heaven and earth which again Jesus set aside in His state of humiliation when He did not use His godly powers fully, when He humbled Himself and became poor for us. Now all things are put under His control. This includes all material wealth, all created things and all creatures and also God's people.

4. WISDOM: Now in the state of Exaltation, Jesus again has the full and constant use of His omniscience, knowing all things.

5-7. HONOR, GLORY AND BLESSING: Jesus has exchanged all of the shame, disgrace and ridicule which had been heaped upon Him in His suffering and death for **HONOR, GLORY** and **BLESSING**. **Honor is the high regard and reverence that are due Him. Glory refers to the credit that is due Him and Blessing means the praise that is due Him.**

The Song of praise now reaches its climax. We read in vs. 13 **AND EVERY CREATURE WHICH IS IN HEAVEN AND ON THE EARTH AND UNDER THE EARTH AND SUCH AS ARE IN THE SEA, AND ALL THAT ARE IN THEM, I HEARD SAYING: BLESSING AND HONOR AND GLORY AND POWER BE TO HIM WHO SITS ON THE THRONE, AND TO THE LAMB, FOREVER AND EVER!**

Here the word for every **CREATURE** is different from the "living creatures." Since all of the living creatures already were present, it seems here that the word means **ALL CREATED THINGS**. Even God's inanimate creation gives Him praise. We read of this in Psalm 19:1 **THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD**. In Psalm 98:4-9 we read; **SHOUT JOYFULLY TO THE LORD, ALL THE EARTH; BREAK FORTH IN SONG, REJOICE, AND SING PRAISES, SING TO THE LORD WITH THE HARP, WITH THE HARP AND THE SOUND OF A HORN; SING JOYFULLY BEFORE THE LORD, THE KING. LET THE SEA ROAR, AND ALL ITS FULNESS, THE WORLD AND THOSE WHO DWELL IN IT; LET THE RIVERS CLAP THEIR HANDS; LET THE HILLS BE JOYFUL TOGETHER BEFORE THE LORD, FOR HE IS COMING TO JUDGE THE EARTH. WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS HE SHALL JUDGE THE WORLD, AND THE PEOPLES WITH EQUITY.**

Notice that the worship this mass choir offers to the Lamb also praises the One **WHO SITS ON THE THRONE**. The Father sent His Son, the Lamb, to be our Savior. Now the Father gives the Lamb the authority to judge all nations so **THAT ALL SHOULD HONOR THE SON JUST AS THEY HONOR THE FATHER**.

To this song of praise the 4 living creatures give their assent. We read in vs. 14 **THEN THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES SAID, "AMEN!" AND THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS FELL DOWN AND WORSHIPED HIM WHO LIVES FOREVER AND EVER.**

The word **AMEN** is in the imperfect tense signifying that John heard their "Amen" not just once, but several times. Amen means, **YES, THIS IS TRUE! YES, IT SHALL BE SO!** The elders, again symbolizing all believers throw themselves down to the ground expressing their humility and thankfulness to their ever living King who rules over all things.

John has been witness to the great multitude of saved and sanctified people who, with the angels and all creation, shall praise their Savior-God forever and serve Him in everlasting righteousness and blessedness. We who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior will be part of that blessed choir. The Lord wanted His persecuted Church to know that this is their blessed future as well That is why He granted this vision to John and had him write it down for others to read.

When the last “Amen” was sung and the elders were prostrate before the throne, one of the most powerful songs ever heard had come to an end. When we read this account it is hard not to think of the majestic musical piece based on these words that George Handel wrote entitled, “The Messiah.” A listener to that piece of music does not have to have a great amount of musical knowledge to be moved by that masterpiece. And perhaps one of the reasons we find that oratorio to be so inspiring is that it serves as a constant reminder of the great and eternal hymn of praise which will be sung by all believers, supported by the multitude of angels and all of creation.

One almost wonders that when God gave the musical inspiration and ability to Handel to write such music, was He giving us a sample--clouded though it may be because of sin and certainly inferior to the perfect voices of praise and glory--but perhaps a hint of the beautiful song heard by John and one which we shall not only hear but also sing in perfect harmony and with perfect hearts of praise in heaven? **How blessed we are that God has revealed for us repentant sinners our future, that we on that last great day will be part of that heavenly choir, singing our praises, and privileged to bow down in humble and joyful worship in the presence of the Lamb who sits on the throne!**

Through all of the difficulties and trials that touch our lives, these words stand as a powerful encouragement. We never need to despair because of our many sins. We never need feel that we are all alone. We never need to give up because we suffer constant and chronic pain. Even if we suffer persecution, no matter how desperate our life may seem, no matter how depressed we may feel, we have someone and something that far overshadows all of our problems. A Savior who was slain for us and rose again to assure us of complete forgiveness and everlasting life with Him. We have a place reserved for us around the throne of God face to face with the Lamb of God!

Let us rise and join in proclaiming these words from Rev. 5 in praise to our Savior-God.

“WORTHY IS THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN TO RECEIVE POWER AND RICHES AND WISDOM, AND STRENGTH AND HONOR AND GLORY AND BLESSING!... BLESSING AND HONOR AND GLORY AND POWER BE TO HIM WHO SITS ON THE THRONE, AND TO THE LAMB, FOREVER AND EVER! ”

Amen.