

## Christmas from the Book of Revelation - The Lamb and the Nations

Sign Title: The Lamb and the Nations

December 12, 2010

Good morning. I am pastor Kurt. For our Scripture reading this morning, we are going back to Revelation 5. I ask that you stand in honor of God's Word as we read the text.

### Revelation 5:9-10

Last week, we began our Christmas series entitled, *Christmas from the Book of Revelation*. The reason we picked this book for Christmas is because Revelation is one of the most Christ exalting books in the Bible. Christ drips from every page. Revelation is not as much about the how-will-it-happen of end times. It is about the unveiling of Christ and worshipping him. End times is a theme in the book but it is not the main theme of the book. We need to keep Christ as our North Star when we read the book. Last week I gave you some interpretive grids to help you when you read Revelation. Since they are so important, I want to begin by reviewing them with you, then giving you a new one before we move on to our study of the text. Let's begin.

### Background of Revelation

1. **Revelation is a letter and an apocalypse.** Last week we learned Revelation is a letter and an apocalypse. We are familiar with letters but apocalypses are new. It is a really funky kind of literature with weird creatures, battle scenes, dreams and visions. Last week we learned a few keys to understand this funky kind of writing.

2. **The meaning in an apocalypse is primarily in the image, rather than the words.** Look for meaning in the weirdness of the pictures Revelation paints on the canvas of your mind. They are weird for a reason. Hold the phone because I will give you an example of how that works in just a moment.
3. **Apocalyptic literature has a common theme.** A hero is coming. We live in a world where it is always winter and never Christmas, but a hero is on the way. He will smash through Satan, sin, destruction and pain. This hero will finish off Satan and sin forever. He will restore and vastly improve everything for eternity. Get excited! Jesus Christ, the lion, who is the lamb that was slain, took the scroll from the father's hands. He can and will be the hero who culminates history.
4. **To understand Revelation, check your Old Testament.** Revelation is saturated with Old Testament quotations and themes. The Old Testament is the pair of glasses we need to look through when we want to understand what is going on in Revelation.  
  
I told you last week, I was going to give you another interpretive grid to help you read and understand Revelation. Here it is.
5. **Numbers count in Revelation.** Numbers in Revelation are significant. Sometimes numbers have just a literal meaning. Sometimes numbers have just a literal meaning and other times they have both a literal and figurative meaning. Let me show you what I mean. Some of the numbers in Revelation with a figurative meaning are 7, 12 and their multiples.

**The Number Seven** - Seven is used in the Bible to represent completeness. For instance, in Genesis, it was seven days for God to complete creation. Genesis 4:14 talks about the sevenfold wrath of God, meaning the complete wrath of God. In Revelation 1-3 there are seven letters to the churches. Why did Jesus choose to write to just seven churches? In the ancient readers mind, seven letters to seven churches represented all churches. In Revelation 5, the lamb has seven horns and seven eyes. Horns represent power in apocalyptic literature. Read the apocalyptic literature in the book of Daniel to see which is the OT backdrop of this section. Eyes represent knowledge. So the lamb with seven horns and seven eyes has all power and all knowledge. In the rest of Revelation you have seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, seven messages of judgment on Babylon and seven last things. Anybody getting the idea there is something symbolically significant with the number seven?

**The Number Twelve** - This number also represents completeness but it represents completeness in diversity. For example, the Old Testament people of God are made up of twelve tribes. The New Testament people of God come from the twelve apostles. The number twelve, and multiples of it, are worked into the New Jerusalem, the home of God's people in Revelation. For example, in Revelation 21, there are twelve foundation stones and twelve gates to the New Jerusalem. The walls of the New Jerusalem are 144 cubits thick. That is  $12^2$ . The length, width and height

of the new Jerusalem is 12,000 stadia. That is twelve multiplied by a thousand. A thousand usually represents vastness in apocalyptic literature.

Does that mean the dimensions of the New Jerusalem in Revelation are not literal? Not necessarily. It means there is figurative significance to the dimensions, even though it can still be literal. For example, Jesus wrote seven letters to seven literal churches in the first three chapters of the book. There is literalness and figurative significance to that number. Is the thousand years of the Millennial kingdom in Revelation 20 a figurative number just representing a long time or is it a literal number representing a thousand years? Why couldn't it be both? A thousand years is a long time!

There is a lot more that could be said about numbers in Revelation. As I studied, I found myself amazed at the intricacy of what goes on numerically in Revelation. For those of you who like to debate that stuff, I have given you enough to talk about over lunch.

This morning, I want to focus in on the new song that was sung to Christ when he took the scroll. There is a lot of good stuff in there for us.

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, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."  
Revelation 5:9–10 (ESV)

There are three things I want us to notice about the song.

### It is a worship song.

The song starts out by saying *Worthy are you to take the scroll*. The word *worthy* is a very interesting word. It is a very precise word in the Greek. It means something is worthy because it has inherent value, not attributed value. Let me explain.

This Christmas your kids have gift lists. Somebody wants a Barbie doll. Somebody wants an Xbox with the new Kinect system. Somebody wants a snowboard. If your kids are like most, they tell you the only way they can be happy is if they get the gift they want on Christmas morning. I have news for you. Next year, most of the stuff they can't live without will be in the garbage. The only reason they can't live without it is because they decided they need it. They attributed value to it. Some day they will outgrow it or no longer care about it and it won't be worth anything to them anymore. That means stuff has value because we decided it is valuable. That is *not* the kind of value the word *worthy* is talking about in this verse. The Greek here means *inherent* value. In other words, Christ is worthy of worship whether we acknowledge it or not.

Jesus is the center of the universe. Everything and everyone will worship him whether they acknowledge him as worthy or not.

Here is the news flash. The world doesn't revolve around me and my happiness. It revolves around Christ and his glory. That is the way life works whether I choose to believe it or not. This is very difficult for us to remember. We live in a culture where everything is about getting what we want when we want. Go to Burger King and you can get the burgers your way. We can buy an

iPod, iPad and an iPhone. We live in a me centered culture where we are told the world exists to make us happy. Sniff the coffee; God the Father and the lamb are at the center of the universe, not you or me. Life is about God's glory, not my happiness. Until we get that right, we will make a real mess of life. Some of us are going through difficult times right now. Some of you are unemployed. Some of you have just gone through a divorce. Some of you are struggling with your children. Many people say, "God, there must be a mistake in your plan because I'm not happy right now." Since when was the purpose of life to make you happy? God sometimes puts us through tough times so we can be faithful to him in those times and bring glory to him and demonstrate our love for Christ. God sometimes puts us through hard times to test us and see what is in our heart. God sometimes puts us through tough times to bring us to repent of our sin. God sometimes disciplines us in hard times because he loves us and is giving us an opportunity to bring him more glory.

Some of you Oprah fans have read or heard of Eckard Tolle and his book *The New Earth*. Let me tell you what the book says about life. "You are the highest truth in the universe." Eckard goes on to say, "If you look for truth some place else, you will be deceived." Friends, I love you. Can you see what that is? It is Satan's lie from the Garden of Eden all over again. Eve, you are the highest truth in the universe. Eve, what is most important is that you are happy, not that you demonstrate your submission to God by trusting him, obeying him and giving him glory. Eve, you are the center of all things."

The reasons Eckard Tolle's book sells so well is because it appeals to our culture which says we are the center of the universe. My happiness is the purpose of life. That isn't true. The lamb is at the center. He is worthy. It doesn't matter whether you think he is or not. He is worthy because he has *inherent* value.

### **It is a Suffering Song.**

It says, "You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals *because you were slain*." That word *slain* is used nowhere else in the New Testament besides the book of Revelation where it is used four times. John doesn't make the word up but borrows it from Isaiah 53 in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament in use at that time. It is a very aggressive word. It means butchered or slaughtered. It is a very bloody death.

Why all this emphasis on a violent, bloody death? I don't know if you have realized it but every world religion focuses on some kind of animal sacrifice. There is a universal understanding that it is only by blood and death by which sin can be atoned. Christianity comes along and says while it is true that sin can only be dealt with by death, the blood of an animal can not cover the sin of a man. The only bloody death that can take care of our sin is the death of Christ, the lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world.

Do not miss this. Central to the mission of the lamb of God was to die a brutal, bloody, death for the purpose of paying off our sin debt to God. Verse 9 says the lamb's blood was payment made to God to buy back lost sinners.

This is called the *doctrine of blood atonement*. It means to appease somebodies wrath. The concept that God is angry doesn't fly well today. The picture of God is a grandfatherly type that winks at sin. That is not the biblical picture. The Bible is clear that God's wrath burns hot against sin. God is steaming angry against us. What makes God angry? Things that don't look so bad to most of us. Disregarding love for others, failing to bring about justice, pouring our heart felt affections to something in place of God, mixing true worship with false worship.

Amos 5:18 and Zephaniah 1:15 talk about the *Day of the Lord* where God will return and pour out his wrath. The good news is that Christ stepped in and took the wrath of God that is justly ours. In his death, through his blood, he purchased people for God. This is why I love Hebrews 9:28

so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. Hebrews 9:28 (ESV)

That is New Testament Christianity. That is what was attacked in the mainline churches in the 20's and 30's that resulted in their erosion and morphing into social clubs. It is what some leaders in the emergent church movement are attacking again. One emergent author said the necessity of the blood atonement by the son to buy back people from the wrath of the father is tantamount to cosmic child abuse by the father against the son. Friends, that is New Testament Christianity!



Folks, something else we need to hear from this book that we don't like to hear is that Jesus Christ is not the only one who goes through suffering as God's plan unfolds.

Just as Christ won his victory by his sacrificial death rather than military might, as Christ's followers, we will suffer and some of us will even die as we participate with and fill up the sufferings that are part of Christ's victory.

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Revelation 12:11 (ESV)

How did these Christians conquer Satan? By being willing to suffer for Christ, even if it meant their death.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, Colossians 1:24 (ESV)

Paul is not saying Christ's death was insufficient to pay for our sin. Just as Christ conquered Satan by his suffering and death, as followers of Christ, expect suffering and maybe even death for Christ will be part of our lives. Suffering is one of the ways Christ's church conquers and spreads.

Tertullian, an early church father said it well. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The more Christians are persecuted, suffer and die, the more the church spreads. Friends, it is in times of suffering that our faith grows. It is in times of suffering that what we really believe about Christ is tested and it is seen by others. Many times our suffering is the way God will grow his church.

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, Philippians 1:29 (ESV)

and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:17 (ESV)

Friends, suffering and death was part of the way Christ conquered Satan. As brothers and sisters of Christ, expect suffering will be part of our lives. While we don't go looking for suffering. It is one of the most effective ways God works in us and through us. Expect it.

**It is a missionary song.**

Verse 9 says Christ purposed people from every tribe and language and people and nation. That is beautiful. It means the KKK and their white supremacy is whacked. It means black supremacy is whacked. It means any ethnic group that thinks they are the center of the universe is dead wrong. That includes Jews, Arabs, English, Dutch, Chinese and yes, even Scandinavian. Nobody is God's favorite. The lamb was slaughtered for all people of all colors.

Revelation 5:9 is what the lamb died for. Revelation 7:9 is what heaven will some day look like.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, Revelation 7:9 (ESV)

But what we forget is the price tag when you go from 5:9 to 7:9. That is 6:9.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. Revelation 6:9 (ESV)

Martyrdom is the price tag for reaching the nations with the gospel. The price is suffering. I especially want teenagers and young adults to hear this

because you have your whole life ahead of you. You can choose to live big for Jesus and lay up an entire lifetime of treasure in heaven. I believe God is calling some of you to go full time into Christian service. God is calling some of you to an unusually high level of sacrifice and suffering to reach the nations for Jesus. According to [www.joshuaproject.net](http://www.joshuaproject.net) the world population is 6.73 billion people. 2.77 billion do not have a church or a Christian in them. That means 41.2% of the population of the world does not have any knowledge of Christ. You know why they aren't reached? These are the hard places to reach, the places you risk your life going to.

Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. Revelation 6:11 (ESV)

Many people don't like to hear this but the text is clear. God has already ordained a certain number of martyrs who must be sacrificed and die before the end will come and the nations are fully reached with the gospel. That is what it means to add up the suffering that are lacking in Christ. Friends, contrary to what many people think the reason the church is not expanding in these unreached people groups is not because of lack of money, it is because of the lack of courage to go. One of the reasons people are not willing to go is because they think that any time there is suffering, they are outside of God's will. That is just plain wrong. Young people. Get that in your head. Is God calling you to go full time to reach the nations?

About 700 years ago there was a man named Raymond Lull who was a spanish missionary to the muslims of North Africa. He prayed a very unusual

prayer. He prayed God would let him die as a martyr. He was in his 70's when God answered that prayer. Let me read to you his words.

“Missionaries will convert the world by preaching but also through the shedding of blood with great labor and through a bitter death.” - Raymond Lull

God has not called all of us to be martyrs but he has called all of us to be willing to be harassed, persecuted, rejected when we say the lamb is the center of the universe. It doesn't matter what other people think. This is either true or we should go home and forget all the money it takes to keep this place in operation.

Folks, here is a challenging thought. John Piper put it so well.

“There is a great difference between the kind of Christianity that wrestles with whether to worship at the cost of imprisonment and death and the kind of Christianity which wrestles with whether my kids should play travel soccer on Sunday morning.” - John Piper.

There is a huge difference. I am not pointing fingers this morning but for some of us we will not sacrifice our sports or our travel for Sunday morning. What are we teaching our kids about what is important? Revelation calls us to be prepared to worship the lamb at the cost of our lives. That is the kind of worship God will use to reach the world. Anything less is a false gospel.

### **What is this song summoning us to do?**

1. **Surrender to the Lamb.** - I don't know who you are or where you are at on your spiritual journey but this song tells us to make sure you have pledged allegiance to the lamb. There will be a lot of people in hell eternally who went to church every week. Church for them was checking off the religion box but Christ wasn't the center. He didn't affect their shopping habits, their giving

habits, their serving habits, their internet habits, their sex habits or what they watched on television after the kids went to bed. Life is not about our happiness, it is about God's glory. He is the center whether we acknowledge it or not.

2. **Prove our salvation by our obedience.** - That comes screaming out of this passage. There will be suffering in this life. How we suffer and where we go under the pressure of suffering demonstrates to the world, to ourselves and to God the reality of our faith. Salvation is not so much about a time in junior high summer camp when we came forward. That is just the beginning of faith. Our salvation is worked out every day in our choices and values. It is worked out in regular times of study in God's word. It is worked out by constantly owning up to our sin before God and getting on our knees before God to confess them, repent of them and clinging to Christ's grace again every morning. Part of working out our salvation may involve suffering. It may even involve martyrdom.
3. **Pursue the joy of the lamb.** - While this song can have a somber note to it, at its core is joy. There is no more joyous place to be than when the lamb is at the center of our lives and we know that we are the object of his affections. When we suffering like him, we can look forward to being glorified with him.

### Prayer

Jesus, thank you for being the center of the universe. Thank you for bringing meaning to suffering in our life. Thank you for giving us a role to play through our suffering in the growth of your kingdom. Thank you for the rich reward that lies ahead when we suffer well. Christ, I pray for the young men and women who have their whole lives in front of them. I pray you would call a few of them to

have the courage to reach the nations and that you would begin that today.  
Amen



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