

Apr. 29, 2018

Lesson 8: Blessing, Glory, Honor Forever

Scripture: Revelation 5:6-14

Context:

Last week our study took us to the Book of Revelation and the background of its writer, John of Patmos. In chapter four, John takes readers to the throne of God with all the symbols that represent the grandeur of God. Chapter five continues the same scene bringing in a different symbol.

The symbol is that of a slain Lamb, with seven horns and seven eyes. The Lamb has the ability to read and move as it opens the seals, or scrolls, mentioned in the chapter. The elders and living creatures present bow down before the Lamb and praise the Lamb as the one who was slain for “every tribe, language, people and nation” and has appointed priests to serve those people for God.¹ When the writer looks up, they see that there is an entire court with all involved praising God. Millions praise the slaughtered Lamb who is the one that is to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing. The writer then hears the echoes of all those in the heavens, earth, and under the sea repeating the sound of praise. The elders continue to worship in the presence of the Lamb.

There are some who might ponder about the significance of this scene, particularly a slain Lamb with multiple body parts. It may strike one as more bizarre and science fiction film material instead of a part of the Bible. However, the writer is using symbolism to help make their point about the nature of God and worship. In this case, the writer presents their first of twenty-nine times where Christ is presented as a “Lamb”.² But the Lamb is not so simple; he is always a *slain* Lamb with wounds of being beaten and slaughtered. The reason for this portrayal of Christ is to show that his death was not just a strategy of the earthly Jesus to be replaced by a violent God who uses violence when “they’ve had their chance,” and love hasn’t quite gotten the job done.³ Jesus as a sacrificial Lamb makes it clear that God is more about love and grace than seeking out retribution for those who have erred. For the Christian community, the cross of Jesus redefines what we understand as “winning.”⁴ In fact, we are given a whole new understanding of love following a slain Lamb with its own blood instead of a warrior king with the blood of others on his hands.

As we see in the text, this slain Lamb unites all. The text describes worship as an international affair with representation from every group imaginable. It is important as we read this chapter to remember that this scene would have been read in every congregation that assembled for worship.⁵ Worship services brought the old and new together to participate in praising God, who has already saved the day and is the one in control. Those hearing it would have been able to imagine their brothers and sisters across

¹ Rev. 5: 9; NRSV.

² M. Eugene Boring, “Revelation,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1989), 108.

³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

the continents hearing these visions and being united as a people of one Lord.

Application:

There are several things we can learn from this text. The first deals with how we understand Christ as Lord and Savior and the images and qualities that we associate with him. In this case we have Jesus as a Lamb. He is not labeled as a “sheep,” he is labeled as a “lamb.” When we think of lambs, we think of a baby sheep innocent and frolicking in fields. Even in popular culture, we know about the nursery rhyme “Mary Had the Little Lamb,” and more recently, Lamb Chops, the friendly lamb who is everyone’s friend. The emphasis is that a lamb is something sweet and calming. I know that for me, I do think there is always to be a focus on Jesus as the Lord and Savior as our lives. Yet I think seeing Jesus as Lamb is also important. We experience love so pure from someone who has a sweet spirit. This sweet spirit comforts and nourishes us even when we feel broken and abused. This image struck me as I thought of my own labrador retriever who licked my wounds after a race event and with a look of pity on his face. Jesus is like that loyal companion who is always present tending to our fears, our doubts, and our wounds. This companion willingly even dies for others. We learn more about transforming love that should make us be in awe of the depths that God will go for us. How do you see Jesus? What are your favorite images of him?

The other incredible takeaway from this text is the multitude involved in worship. The text speaks of “millions” worshipping the slain Lamb. The author makes it very clear that they were different with all sorts of groups represented: creatures, angels, elders, and humans of every tribe, language, people, and nation. To me, the scene reminds me of what happens with General Conference every four years in the UMC. I was privileged to have an opportunity to attend in 2008 in Fort Worth/Dallas, Texas with my college Birmingham-Southern College. I marveled at the people there with different backgrounds. As I wandered around, I couldn’t help but be grateful that the UMC is not just an American church or an English-speaking church. God was at work in the lives of so many different people who knew Jesus and experienced that redeeming love.

This week, as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Methodist Church, I cannot help but be struck by how much this scene harkens back to that time in 1968. Different branches of Methodism came together to unite in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Of course there were issues. People spoke different languages. There were varying cultural beliefs of the places represented. The United States at the time was experiencing a wave of social shifts that were rocking the world with integration and women’s rights. There were challenges.

Yet those men and women felt God calling them together to be a part of something larger than themselves. The unification the Methodist branches of 1968 sought to abolish the Central Jurisdiction that grouped African American churches separate from white churches. It also helped bring all the different branches to be a united front in affirming women’s call to ordained ministry. Together, the worshipping body moved to God’s Kingdom instead of the divisive kingdoms of the world. The scene was reminiscent of the one we read today where all bow before God and lift their praises to the slain Lamb who died for all people in all ages.

As our denomination continues to have conversations about controversial issues, perhaps we would dwell to turn back and look at this unification in 1968. Or better yet, turn to these pages in Revelation and let the living God help us see the things that are to truly form who we are and whom we worship. Our voices are to lift in different tongues and sing: “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”⁶

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⁶ Rev. 6: 13, NRSV.