

Revelation 5: 1-7; “Worthy to Open the Scroll”, Sermon # 38 in the series – “The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 22nd, 2015, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

Having seen in chapter 4 what worship is supposed to look like in the churches, and in the lives of God’s people during the whole Church age, we are now, in chapter 5, shown the Scroll, or the Book of God’s purposes, in relation to the Church. This book is described as being “in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne”. All that pertains to God’s sovereign purpose in relation to His Elect in every generation in the Church age is pictured for us here as a scroll or a book which is written on the inside, and on the back and sealed with seven seals. We must ask ourselves: What is the purpose of God’s revealing to us that He has such a book? God could have kept the contents of this book sealed and have never revealed any of it to us. But He has chosen to reveal a portion of it in this book of Revelation. Well I think that we can discover several good reasons from our text why God the Father would choose to reveal to Christ’s Church the fact that He has such a book; and in time, to reveal some of its contents. Let’s find out some of these reasons this afternoon.

1st of all – God the Father would have us to understand some of the details of Church History, before they happen. (Verse 1)

This is the picture of the scroll or book. The ancient book, the book of John’s day, was not a book like the books that we have in our libraries today. It was parchment or velum in sheets, with writing on one or both sides, rolled on to a wooden rod. The last section of the scroll would be attached to this rod first; rolled around it and sealed. The next to the last section would then be rolled over the last and then sealed, and so forth until all the sections were added on, to the first section. Each section would have its own seal. In my translation, the New King James, there is a comma placed after the word “back” in verse 1. And this makes it appear that the scroll that John saw had writing on the inside and the back; but I wonder, if actually, the comma should fall after the word “inside”? If the comma or pause were placed there, then the writing would only be on the inside and the seals would be on the back. Andrew Fuller has this note in his commentary – “By the punctuation in our translation it would seem as if they were written upon on both sides; but this would not comport with the contents being secret, which they were till the seals were unloosed.” “It seems, therefore, that a comma is necessary after the word “inside” in verse 1.” This is significant in terms of what the passage is teaching. The passage is teaching that this is the book of God’s decrees concerning the Church of Jesus Christ in this world, and what is to become of it.

This book of God’s decrees is secret. It is known only to Him in all its details, but through this book of Revelation, we are given an overview of what the Church, the Kingdom of Christ, would go through, and face, in terms of oppositions from Satan’s kingdom. The major points of spiritual contention between Christ’s kingdom, and Satan’s kingdom of darkness, would be made known to the saints. They would thus be strengthened to endure and to triumph. There is a progression to the unfolding of events, and the Church’s forward progress, with regard to gospel truth and all the truth of God’s holy Word. This is well pictured by this scroll. When each seal is opened, then some aspect of the purpose of God in relation to Christ’s church in that time period is revealed. The different aspects of Satan’s opposition, his schemes, and how they would be faced by God’s people would thus be known in general. All of this, and more, is in the book or the scroll that was in the right hand of the One who sat on the throne. In this book are set forth, in a broad overview, the times for the sufferings of Christ’s Church and the times of her triumphs. These various oppositions and triumphs are all very specifically decreed by God the Father to take place in such a way, as that great glory will come to Him for the way that the

Church has faced these oppositions and triumphed over them through the grace of their Savior, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

2nd – God the Father would have us to understand that no one in heaven or earth is able to open this book, or worthy to loose its seals. (Verses 2-4)

When you see that a strong angel is proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals,” and you realize that he can’t do it; and you read, “And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it”, you then realize that the plight of lost humanity is much greater than anyone knows. Not only is there no man on earth who does not sin, but there is no man on the earth that can really lead men to act wisely and uprightly toward God. You would think that out of all the people that have ever lived, or out of all the holy angels, that someone in heaven or on the earth, or under the earth, would be able to approach this book, wouldn’t you? But I think that when we think this way, that we haven’t really come to understand how great is the depravity of man, and how great was the fall of Satan, and the other angels that rebelled with him. Satan, I believe did know something of the future; that God’s creature man, who was made lower than the angels, would someday be raised up to be higher than himself. Jonathan Edwards speculates that this may have been the reason for his sin; his great sin of pride, and his anger over the idea that man would one day be raised up above him. It was the reason that he who was to guard the garden of God, treacherously tried to deceive and murder the first couple.

And when we think of what sinful men might do with the knowledge in this scroll, even the best of men, the most moral of men, the men of the greatest character and wisdom, you can see why there was none worthy. Would they be able to handle this knowledge in a pure and uncorrupted way? Would they be able to lead and guide other men into the knowledge of how to glorify God in every situation? This calls for a greater leader than the world has ever seen, except One. The reason that John wept much at this time, I think, is because there was evidently a pause in the vision to see if anyone could be found and the text says that “no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.” John has not, however, forgotten the Lord Jesus Christ. He is weeping because it appeared to him that it had been forgotten that Jesus had lived a perfect and sinless life. It appeared to him that it had been forgotten that Jesus went to the cross and died there; and that the knowledge of what He had done and accomplished there, was not going to be applied to this situation. It gave John a helpless, sinking feeling, a feeling of wondering what would become of the church, what would become of Jesus’ disciples; how would the church ever rise to become everything that John knew that Jesus had said that she would when Christ had said, “The gates of hell would not prevail against it.”

Let us understand that no one of us is able to see into the future of what the Church of Jesus Christ will have to endure, or what she will become, apart from this book of Revelation. No one of us is worthy to open this book or to break its seals. The history of what the Church of Jesus Christ has been through already, and what she yet will become, is so amazing, so profound, and so wonderful, that we have a hard time believing it when we are told it. But let us believe it, because it is sent to us from God Himself. We are told in the book of Acts chapter 13, verse 38 that in Jesus is preached the forgiveness of sins. And, that “everyone who believes is justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” The Jews of that day, many of them, did not see the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, and so Paul and Barnabas warned them saying, “Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: ‘Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish!’ “For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.”

The leaders of that synagogue were envious of the multitudes of people coming to hear the word of God and so they contradicted the things preached by the Apostles. They were blaspheming God and opposing the truth, and so the gospel was taken by Paul to the Gentiles.

We are in great danger in our day from the same kind of unbelief, in Christendom in general. We cannot believe that the Church of Jesus Christ has gone through so many strange, and awful, and wonderful times in the past which have brought her to where she is today. And we cannot believe that the greatest days of gospel prosperity lie ahead, in what this book calls the Millennium in Chapter 20. But let us now think more about this in the final point of this sermon.

3rdly- God the Father would have us understand that there is One who is able to open the Book and loose its seals. (Verses 5-7)

One of the Elders said to John, "Do not weep." "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." It is one of the 24 Elders which represent the Church that says, "Do not weep," to John. It is one of the elders who brings this message of comfort to the apostle who once laid his head on Christ's bosom at the Supper. The symbol is this. There will always be in the Church of Jesus Christ those who remember Who is worthy to open the book and loose its seals. This truth never will be entirely forgotten, even though at times in Church history it will have seemed to be forgotten. Jesus Christ is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus Christ is the Root of David who has prevailed over sin and death. Jesus Christ became the central figure of all of human history when He, as the Son of God, went to the cross and died for our sins. That is why in verse 6 John says that "he looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth." The symbol of the Lamb is the symbol of Christ's having become the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World," as it says in John 1: 29. It was Christ becoming the sacrifice for our sins that prevailed with God to consider Him worthy to be able to take the Book and loose its seals. This also is the basis of Jesus Christ being given all power in heaven and earth, and sitting in the midst of the Throne with God the Father. Jesus is risen from the dead, He has ascended on high, and He is now seated on His Father's throne, or "in the midst of the Throne as it says here. God the Father has "given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father." (John 5: 22, 23)

This has tremendous implications for the building of the church; the very thing that we are speaking of here. Because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, there is now a prospect in view that over the course of the Church age that the Church herself will also overcome and sit down on the Throne. Revelation 3: 21 says, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." Jesus Christ is presently ruling in heaven from the midst of throne, but He is also going to empower His Church to prevail over the systems of evil raised up by Satan; "to tear down strongholds, to cast down arguments, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." (2nd Corinthians 10: 5) One of the great reasons that the Church exists is "to take every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ." According to this book, the Church will come to prevail over her enemies and Christ's. Isaiah 54: 17 says, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn." "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me, says the Lord."

Let us remember this afternoon just how worthy the Lord Jesus is to "take this scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne." I want you to turn with me over to Daniel chapter 2. You will remember that in Daniel chapter 2 we are looking at a king who had dreams and whose spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him. He called for the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell him his dreams. This request was not simply to interpret the dreams, but to tell the king what the dreams were. A very unreasonable request indeed.

And, the men who couldn't interpret the dream, the king was intent on putting to death, as he thought that they were useless to him. But God revealed the dream to Daniel. The dream was of a great statue and Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold. Then the rest of the body represented the 3 world monarchies which would follow his. This fourth world kingdom was the Roman Empire. In verse 44 it says, "And in the days of these kings (of the Roman Empire) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." When Daniel was describing for the king his dream, he said in verse 34 something very interesting about Christ's kingdom, which is the Church. He said: "You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces." "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found." "And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." This, my beloved brethren, is the destiny of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is that His glorious kingdom will fill the whole earth with the knowledge of the glory of God and Christ. And God will make an end of every false religious system and kingdom which would set themselves up against Him. It will yet come to pass that the gospel will come to all nations, and it will prevail greatly among the nations. This has not yet happened, but it will, if I am interpreting these passages rightly.

And in Daniel 7, we find Daniel once again interpreting another dream. Here we find again a dream about 4 beasts representing the 4 world monarchies; Assyria, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. This Roman Empire transitions into the kingdom of the antichrist as described in verse 8. But in the verses following, God the Father, the Ancient of Days, sits for judgment against him. In verse 10 it says that the court was seated, and the books were opened. One of these books, or all of them together, is the same book that we see here in Revelation 5. For in verse 13 we find One like the Son of Man coming, coming to the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom, dominion, and glory, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. The rest of the chapter goes on to talk about how this antichristian system should be destroyed and the kingdom of Christ prevail. It says in verse 27, "Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High, His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him." This is what this whole book of Revelation is tending toward. This is the future of Christ's kingdom on the earth. And you and I should look with great hope and expectation at the future, that the gospel shall be sent through many people and many churches into all the earth. And by the power of God's Holy Spirit working together with many Christians, Jew and Gentile, Christ's truth will prevail, and His kingdom, His Church, shall one day reign upon the earth. We shall speak more of these things in the next message.