

Worshiping Christ, the Lamb Who is Worthy

DARRELL DELANEY

When I work out at the gym, I usually count down when lifting weights or doing repetitive exercise. Counting down lets me know how many I have to endure before I can rest. With each countdown: three more, two more, one more. I am encouraged by the progress and so look forward to that rest at the end. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we encounter John, who is seeing a fantastic vision of our Lord and receives practical encouragement to know that as time comes closer to the end of all things, Christians can press on, knowing that the eternal rest with God is in the future that is promised. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are continuing in our series on the book of Revelation. This is episode three; and in the first episode, we gave an intro to the series with the study of how Revelation begins in the first chapter; and then with episode two we had Dr. Jeff Weima come and talk about the seven letters.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and those seven letters to the seven churches...or Dr. Weima called them sermons...that took up Revelation 2 and 3; and so, now we are going to move on directly to, in this episode, Darrell, we are going to be looking at Revelation 4 and 5. There is a lot of stuff in Revelation. There are twenty-two chapters, but I think it is safe to say, Darrell, that some of what we are going to look at today in Revelation 4 and 5 are probably some of the parts of Revelation that are the best known and the best loved of the whole book.

DARRELL DELANEY

I do believe you are referring to the visions that John is going to get; and most people, when they think of Revelation, they think of these visions. I was thinking about, too, when we get into this chapter, we are going to see some of those visions.

So, when I went to Kuyper College, I took a class called Biblical Interpretation, and in that class, we read a book called *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* by Gordon Fee; and in that book it explained that you cannot just read the Bible from beginning to end and expect it to be just one particular genre. There are many different genres in the Bible. There is the wisdom literature, there is the historical narrative, there is the prophetic/apocalyptic literature, which is what we are getting into today; and that book that Gordon Fee gave us...he told us that there were different ways that you need to read in the scripture; allow the scripture to read into you, and it cannot be interpreted all the same way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; one of the things that you learn in seminary, about hermeneutics, which is a big long word for interpreting the Bible, I always compare hermeneutics to being like a tool kit, you know; you've got maybe five different kinds of screwdrivers and you've got pliers and you've got wrenches; and depending on what job is, you need to reach for a different tool...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And different parts of the Bible require different hermeneutical or interpretive tools. So, when you've got a poem like in the Psalms, well, that is a certain type of screwdriver. When you've got a literal narrative like in the gospels, that is another type of tool; and when you get apocalyptic, that is different again. That is so important to remember, Darrell, because one of the things that I heard someone named Martin Marty note at one time that the book of Revelation is the one book of the Bible that is clearly presented as almost like a dream vision...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And yet, the irony is that it is also the one book of the Bible that people try to interpret literally; but everybody knows you cannot quite interpret dreams and visions literally that requires a different interpretative approach.

So, we know that in history mistakes have been made when we have tried to treat apocalyptic literature like Revelation as though it were a straightforward narrative like the Gospel of Mark.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and the apocalyptic literature...apocalyptic is just a fancy word for revelation...and scholar Brad Nelson defines apocalyptic literature as a genre of revelatory scripture, in which revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality. In other words, John has brought heaven into earth. He has brought us into heaven to see what is going on, but it has a cosmic perspective to it, but it has earthly implications; and so, what you talked about, Scott, is how we need to avoid certain pitfalls because there is a tool...a device...called allegory, where you try to find a one-for-one co-reference for what it is. St. Augustine did this allegory form when he talked about the good Samaritan, which is something he used to interpret: Okay, this is what it means: This means this man is half dead; this is humans are half dead; this is the gospel that needs to be preached to them; and you cannot do that when you are actually interpreting Revelation because you will come to an erroneous, self-imposed solution that will move you far away from the intended meaning.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, we want to get into Revelation Chapter 4 here, and want to bear all that in mind in terms of how we interpret it, but let's listen to what John says. On the island of Patmos, again, the irony here, Darrell, is that the Romans exiled John to keep him away from Jesus, but Jesus found him on the island; and so, John writes this in Revelation 4:

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."² At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.³ And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.⁴ Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning and rumbles and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.^{6a} Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

DARRELL DELANEY

^{6b}In the center around the throne there were four living creatures and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stopped saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord

God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.”⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ¹¹“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

So, Scott, we see that John is having a hard time trying to explain in his human nature what is happening, and God is blowing his mind with this vision. So, he says it is like this; it has an appearance of that; and he is trying his best to explain what is happening. It is really powerful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is amazing what he writes, but yes; you get the sense he is just doing his best, because what he is seeing is nothing anybody has ever seen; and so, he is conveying this.

Some years ago, Darrell, I worked on a book on Christian stewardship of the environment; kind of celebrating the physical creation of God; and one thing I noted in this chapter here...so this is the first heavenly song John hears here in Revelation 4, but it is not about redemption. It is about creation. The first thing for which they say: You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, for you *created* all things. So, that is elevating the importance of creation. In the next chapter, which we are going to get to in a few minutes...in Revelation 5...then we get: For you redeemed all things; but first he gets praise for creating all things; and as we are going to see further into this series, though Revelation may be a heavenly vision, again and again in this book, we see the importance of the physical creation of God, where we live right now; and this is the first time that we see that.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing; and not only do we get the idea that this is the creator, but this creator is other, in a class by himself. There is no one who can be compared to him; and when we pray, we pray this in the matchless name of Jesus. This is the one who has no match. He is, in and of himself, holy and other than us; and as we talk about this matchless God who is in a class by himself, we want to continue to dig into scripture. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we have been looking at the magnificent vision that John is having right now, and that is blowing his mind. He is struggling to try to explain it; and we are looking at what he is seeing that no one has ever seen before; so he is trying his best to write it down; but the good news is, he got it, and that is what is encouraging to us as believers today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we are looking at that vision that he saw in Revelation Chapter 4, and here is something that is important to point out, Darrell: So, he saw that throne that we just, you know, had described for us in those majestic terms with lightning and peals of thunder; and oh, my goodness, there were so many things that John saw; but sometimes, I think, when we read Revelation 4 and 5, we think that John is seeing the future; but it is pretty clear that he is seeing the worship in the throne room of God that is happening right now.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What God did was peel back the curtain to show him what is going on *now*! So, whenever we worship God here, in church on Sunday, or anywhere we are, Darrell...when we worship God, we are participating in

something that is already going on in heaven. So again, what John sees is *now*; not what is going to happen later, later, later. No; this is what is going on 24/7, to put it in earthly terms, in the heavenly throne room, and that is a very exciting thing, that we are always joining in with the ongoing, incessant worship in heaven.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, you know as a pastor, Scott, that is the aspect of Reformed theology that we believe: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is (right now) in heaven. So, we are actually participating with heaven in the worship that they are doing right this moment; and we invite people into that worship space each week when we go into worship on Sundays. So, the idea that John is seeing this in real time, it is happening right now; that is something that we need to be reminded of. It is a beautiful thing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think it is interesting, too, that I have often thought, Darrell, in that part of the Lord's Prayer, I sometimes think when we get to the "on earth as it is in heaven," we only apply that to "thy will be done," right? It is like, yeah, yeah, we want to follow God's law. No; it is both of those things: Thy kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven. So, we want glimmers of the kingdom, not just God's will being done; both thy kingdom come and thy will be done; both on earth as it is in heaven—as it is in heaven *right now* so that we participate in all of that.

But let's jump ahead now, Darrell, to the next chapter. This vision continues. John is going to hear a new song, and for that we go to Revelation Chapter 5.

DARRELL DELANEY

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. ²And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" ³But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. ⁵Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." ⁶Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁷He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. ⁹And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

So again, Darrell, John here trying to write down what is almost unwritable, this amazing vision of this Lamb; and you know, I have seen a lot of stained-glass windows with the Lamb of God from this vision. I have actually not seen too many where they actually show a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns. It is usually just kind of like a lamb with two eyes, but John's vision was a little wilder than that. But again, it is all very interpretive and apocalyptic here.

Also interesting: First, the one where they would open the scroll is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but when John looks, it is not a lion, it is a Lamb—a lamb that had been dead.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, there are two things that stuck out to me, Scott. One was the actual scroll. Back in the day when they wrote on scrolls, I don't think they wrote on both sides. So, the fact that this scroll has both sides means that scholars believe that this is the full and final revelation of what is to come that is written down for John to see; and back in the day when they had emperors or kings, they would put their signet ring in wax and they would put the symbol on there and say: No one can open this, by decree, unless the king or the emperor declared it. So, this is the actual symbol that is happening here in the vision; and then the one who is worthy

to open it is the one who had been slain. So, his actual redemption and finished work on the cross gives him the stripes, if you will, to be able to open this scroll and give this revelation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you did it, they are saying. You are worthy because you died; and we know that the word crucifixion isn't in here, but we know exactly, of course, we are referring to the crucifixion—the death—of Jesus; and then the death he overcame by being raised by the power of God from the dead, and that is what has brought us our atonement—our redemption—from every tribe in heaven and on earth.

As that marvelous fact is sinking in, in verse 11, just listen to how this goes:

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹²In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" ¹³Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" ¹⁴The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Darrell, a friend of mine, Trygve Johnson, who is the Dean of Chapel at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, preached on this one time a few years ago at the worship symposium [Calvin Symposium on Worship] at Calvin. When he read this passage, and he had it memorized, he let his voice build and build and build as he read this, because we go from just a few people singing...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To then a thousand angels and then ten thousands upon ten thousands, and then everybody in the creation and in the ocean...I mean, this just gets to be deafening. It is a crescendo of praise.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a really beautiful thing; and it is the appropriate response for those who see the one who has been slain. So, they are thinking about what Christ has done, they are reminding each other all the time of what Christ is doing, and they actually worship. That is the appropriate response for those who remember who God is and what God has done; and all the creation is doing that. There is no fear; they are surrounded by angels and elders, and also the choir. It is a beautiful thing. Can you imagine hearing that, Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, my goodness; it does defy our imagination; and as with all these visions, as you put it earlier in this program, Darrell: Mind-blowing; it had to be just mind-blowing for John to, not only see this glory, but as you said, hear a choir of all creation and ten thousand times ten thousand angels. This is what is going on in heaven right now. So, what does it mean for our lives right now? Well, as we wrap up the program in just a moment, we will ask that very question. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and we have seemed to cover a lot of ground in this one, but we want to get to why this was so important, and the so-what of this passage. It might be good to kind of situate where John is as a person. So, it is important to know that...you said it earlier...we talked about it earlier...that he has been exiled to the island of Patmos by the Roman officials and Roman government. They are becoming more and more powerful; they are persecuting Christians for almost everything; and it is very hard for Christians to navigate that, and sometimes they are even killed for their faith; and this place they thought they were going to send John so that he could die, but God and Jesus Christ sent a revelation right there in the middle of that place.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Romans exiled John to show who is in charge. We will show you who's in charge, John. Boom! You're in exile. While he is in exile, who does he see? The one who is really in charge, and guess what? It ain't Caesar!

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the Lamb of God. So John, put then in this place as a sign of Rome's ultimate authority, is shown that Rome is nothing. The real authority is our God in Christ; and what a glorious thing to remember, that God is always in control. So, that is one of the main lessons that we too, in our life, right, Darrell, when we encounter difficult days and seasons of loss and tragedy; seasons when the powers that be in this world seem to be preeminent. We too, along with John, can remember: No; it is the Lamb on the throne. Right now; that is who is really in charge of the universe.

DARRELL DELANEY

And when we are in freefall or when we feel like things are kind of crazy, we can remember that Jesus Christ is still on the throne, that he is still running things. That is one of the prayers that I pray a lot: You are in complete control of every situation. But we also realize that another thing that is important is that living for Christ is definitely worth it, even if it leads to death. I mean, Paul writes this in Philippians 1:20. It says: I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

The scripture says to live is Christ and to die is gain.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because we see that Lamb on the throne, we know even when we die, as Jesus said to Martha at the tomb of Lazarus: If you believe in me, you will never die, even when you die. I am not going to say you are not going to die on this earth, but that is not the end of the story. We live for Christ, and Paul, in Philippians there, you know, just said: Boy, you know, if I die, I am going there; and that is better. I will stay here with you for a while and labor among you...but, you know, that is our hope even in death.

I think another thing that is important to take away, Darrell, from Revelation 4 and 5 that we have looked at in this program is a reminder that again it seems like sometimes our struggles and the battles we fight in this life are against just other people...flesh and blood...governments...you know...corrupt authorities; but our battles are finally spiritual. Paul reminds us of that in another letter. This is from Ephesians 6:

¹⁰[Finally,] be strong in the Lord and his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devils' schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

So again, for John, the Romans who exiled him, they weren't his real enemy, the real enemy is the devil...spiritual forces...things that try to make us doubt the reality of the Lamb on the throne. We need to battle against that, and God has provided us with the spiritual armor, as it were, to withstand it.

DARRELL DELANEY

We put on that full armor each and every day so that we can stand, and I love that. It is very encouraging to know. It helps us keep the battle in perspective as well, because I could make the neighbor the enemy, I could make the news the enemy, I could make the government the enemy, but the spiritual wickedness behind some of those things is the real enemy coming from Satan himself; and then another thing that is important for us to know is that this book isn't designed to freak out Christians or make them afraid. This book is designed to comfort Christians, and let them know that God has an expected end for all creation, and it ends with a

victory and a unity with God and one another, and that is a very powerful thing that we get to look forward to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I liked what you said just now, Darrell, that Revelation isn't supposed to scare us. That is not what this book is here for. It is supposed to be a source of great comfort. We know who is on the throne. We know who is in charge. So, just as John, in the middle of maybe a lonely place of exile, where probably he died ultimately on that island alone, he was shown a vision of great comfort...mind-blowing, as we have said; but he has been shown that there will be a time when there won't be any more sadness or sickness or evil or racism or Alzheimer disease or cancer. We have hope, and it helps us in this time...as Paul says in Ephesians 6...it helps us literally to stand.

DARRELL DELANEY

John is not the only one who needs that encouragement. The First Century Christians whom he wrote to needed that encouragement, and we here today need that encouragement. Even though it is not here fully, we are actually seeing glimpses of it each and every day, and it's a beautiful thing for us to see that God in his Revelation is the fullness of his plan being spoken, and it is coming and we have a knowing and loving God who works all the details out for our favor, for his good, and he gets all the glory, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next times as we continue walking through our study of Revelation with an examination of Chapters 7 through 17.

Meanwhile, connect with us now at our website, groundworkonline.com. Share what *Groundwork* means to you, and make suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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