

Vision of Worship

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[0 : 00] Chaos is all around us. The earth has just had its hottest September in recorded memory. And we're moving back into bushfire territory this summer, even after the horrors of last summer.

The US is heading in the next couple of days to what could be the most divisive and important election in their history. There is potential for so much chaos that shops have started taking guns and ammunition off the shelves for sale.

I only heard this morning that there's a hurricane in the Philippines and a million people have had to be evacuated. The icebergs are melting. There are floods and fires and droughts that are increasing.

People are starving. The rich are getting richer. The politicians who have been elected don't seem to lead for the good of the people that they represent. But just to lead to get elected again.

And the ones who do seem good, well maybe they're actually just corrupt as well. The spread of disinformation is at an all-time high. The spread of the COVID pandemic continues because countries can't agree whether it's real or on how to stop the thing.

[1 : 15] It is very scary to spend a very brief moment reflecting on the reality of the chaos of the world around us. These are all big, systematic problems.

What do we do? All of this chaos is hard to look at. A couple of days ago, a listener, my wife and I, we watched a documentary on Netflix called The Social Dilemma, which is all about the impact that social media is having on us as people and on the world.

And it turns out it's terrible for you. The social media is rotting our brains and it's shaping governments and how people think. I've painted a pretty bleak picture.

I'm usually a glass half full, she'll be right, everything will be okay type of person. But sometimes it's just easier to pretend that everything's fine. Yeah, the result of the election in the next couple of days will be fine.

Bushfires this year won't be that bad. The leaders that we elect will do better this time around. We've learnt from our mistakes. But where does this vague hope come from?

[2 : 25] Do we just ignore the chaos around us, put our head in the sand? Do we just pretend that everything is fine? We're in the book of Revelation and John, the author, well, things weren't better for him in the world when he wrote this letter, when he had this vision.

The emperor was Domitian and people were being urged, don't make trouble. Christians were being persecuted on all sides because they were Christians and they were being pressured to join the imperial cult.

The cult that worshipped the emperor, that he was the son of God. You can understand how that would be a little bit difficult for a Christian to do that. But John didn't worship Domitian as the son of God.

He preached the gospel and was sent to the isle of Patmos. And into that world of chaos, a world where the ruler was ruining Christians' lives, he had a vision of Jesus that we've just read in Revelation 5.

And the challenge for John and for us today is a question of who is in charge. Is there someone who can bring an end to all of this chaos? And today, as we delve deeper into the book of Revelation, we'll look at what this book is most famous for, for its visions.

[3 : 49] And today, as we study this wonderful picture of Jesus, we will see a hidden reality of what we need to see. That Jesus is in control of all things, even when it seems like the world is in chaos.

It would be great if you had your Bible out. We are in Revelation chapter 5. There are Bibles on the side when you came in. Now, we're not handing out Bibles like we used to be able to do because we want to keep those.

We don't have to be handing out and cleaning those at the moment. But there are Bibles over on the side there. If you don't have a Bible, I would love for you to get up and grab one of those and keep that. That is our gift for you.

I would love if you had a Bible so that you could be reading it, so that you could be following God and growing to know Him more and more. You can get up right now. I'm about to pray in a second. You can sneak over there while I'm praying and grab a Bible.

We would love for you to have a Bible to grow in godliness. So as we have a look at Revelation 5, let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to be people who love your word, love to read it and share it with others, and help us today to see the true reality of this world.

[5 : 03] Not to pretend that everything is fine or just ignore the chaos around us, Lord. Amen. Three points for us today that you can follow along in the St. Paul's app.

Firstly, a vision of history. Secondly, a vision of the lion lamb. And then third, we'll see a vision of reality of this world around us.

John has a vision of heaven. And we see this vision language here in chapter 5, and there are these wonderful metaphors.

And whilst these metaphors, these visions can seem intimidating, I'm going to seek to make them clear for us today and to make them obvious. Please have a look at chapter 5, verse 1 with me.

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.

[5 : 59] And we get this picture of God sitting on the throne in heaven. And he has a scroll. Scrolls were official communications sent to a specific authorized person.

They had wax seals that were pressed with the sender's ring so that you could know if it had been tampered with. This is the very early version of package tracking and signature on delivery, which we don't really have anymore.

Packages just get delivered and just left at the front door. But this scroll is significant. It has writing on both sides. There is so much to say that it is just full, front and back.

And it has seven seals. This is the first of our metaphorical language here. It's like, you know, the three's a charm or four is unlucky in Chinese culture.

This number seven here in the Bible means perfect, fulfilled, complete. And so this scroll has the perfect amount of seals indicating the person who could open it, that they would themselves have to be perfect.

[7 : 13] Now, we're not told exactly what is written in this scroll or what it's about. But the next chapters, we're going to see this scroll get opened. And it indicates that this scroll is about God's plan for human history.

This is a scroll that we want to know about. This is a scroll that John wants to know about because it is telling us what God is planning for human history and for the future.

But there's a problem. No one could open it. Verse two, And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, John, he wept and wept.

He has seen the glory of heaven. And he sees God holding out a scroll with the purposes of humanity, how to make sense of the chaos around it, how the promises of what God has for us tomorrow.

But no one can open it. No one, regardless of their political claims, their promises to have a better future for us tomorrow, no one can know what tomorrow holds.

[8 : 33] John sees the mess of the world in chaos around him, and he weeps because there is no one who can sort it out. But he's not left in this depression for long.

An elder speaks, and we see the identity of the person. It's our second point this morning. We see a vision of the lion and the lamb. The elder says, Verse five, have a look with me.

Do not weep. See the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David. He has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.

And there was great rejoicing. Imagine being John in that vision. God's holding out the only hope amid chaos. There's no one. There's tears streaming down your face.

But suddenly there is hope again. One steps forward, the lion of Judah. Do not weep. You are worried about the future, that no one seemed in control.

[9 : 35] The lion can open the scroll. He is in control. And we get this great picture of the long-expected Jesus, the Christ, the chosen one of God, the descendant of King David.

And the elder says that this lion has triumphed. He, it's not that he will triumph. He has triumphed. He has power.

He has victory. He is the strong lion of Judah. It fits with other national animals' displays of strength. You know, in the UK, they have the lion as well.

Russia has the bear. The US has the eagle. China has a dragon. Do you know what Australia's national animals are? Anyone?

A kangaroo? There's another one. An emu. Might seem strange. These animals don't go backwards easily. And so it's a picture of a country always moving forward.

[10 : 38] That's what our national animals are anyway. But John sees a lion. Israel has a lion. A strong and dangerous animal.

That's an animal I could follow. That's an animal of a sports team. I'd like that to be my mascot. And the elder calls John to see this animal. Verse 6. Then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain.

It's not the strongest of animals. No country has a young sheep as its picture of national strength. A lamb is what bears and lions and eagles and dragons eat.

And this lamb looks as if it's already dead. It looks like it's ready for the barbecue. And yet verse 6 continues. The lamb had seven horns and seven eyes.

We get this number again. Seven. That picture of completeness, of fullness, of being perfect. And he has seven horns, seven eyes.

[11 : 45] A horn is a metaphor for strength. So this lamb, this slain lamb, has complete power and complete strength.

And he has seven eyes. It's a picture of knowledge and sight. Complete sight. Complete knowledge. This lamb has power over everything and sees everything.

And this lamb who seems insignificant, weak. He is the one who sees everything, who knows everything.

And he is the one who can go and pick up that scroll. You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain. And with your blood you purchased people for God.

Persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. He is worthy because he was slain. Because he has purchased from heaven with his blood a people.

[12 : 45] He is not worthy because he was powerful. He has not gotten the most votes in an election or won a popularity contest. He has not waged a war and won a military contest.

That slogan, might is right, does not apply here. Jesus, the slain lamb, has a right to rule because he was slain.

He has been given the name above all names. He sits on the throne above all thrones because he's taken us from deserving death and giving us life through a blood transplant.

His life for ours. And in his resurrection and ascension, he is not just the lion of Judah. He is the victorious and slain lamb of the world.

And as the elders sang, he has taken people from every tribe, nation and language and group. And that is who we as a church seek to be. A people who are diverse.

[13 : 46] United by this Jesus. Verse 10. This is a really wonderful picture of Jesus.

He is the slain lamb who is also strong and powerful and sees all. He has triumphed and yet his triumph looks like weakness to everyone else.

He is a slain lamb who willingly died to share his reign with people who did not deserve it. It is a wonderful picture of God's love and scandalous grace.

That Jesus would show such strength in his willingness to be weak. I think there's two implications for us today.

The first is that this is what real strength is. And so we should not trust our own strength. Jesus completely trusted in God to raise him from the dead.

[14 : 59] The slain lamb triumphs in obedience and trusting in God. It is not a personal individual might. But Jesus' strength is God's because he trusts in God.

Steve recently mentioned a quote from Charles Spurgeon. Health is a gift from God. But sickness is a gift greater still. In this last year, I haven't been hit with sickness so much as lots of little individual physical issues.

I've had muscles break. You know, trying to stay healthy and strong. And my body has been failing me. In July, I tore a muscle.

And it is still sore. And it has been painful and frustrating to lie down and sleep or stand or walk or do anything. And yet, I'm reminded that my strength does not come from my body.

My strength does not come from my will or my desire to succeed or my intelligence. The radical gospel of the slain lamb is that I am not only weak, but I am dead and useless.

[16 : 15] I have nothing to offer. But the mighty lion became the slain lamb for me.

We are not strong. We are weak. And the sooner we recognize that, the sooner we see what real strength is. As the elder called John, behold, see, look at this lamb.

Look at the slain lamb. Trusting in God is what true strength is. The second implication, the second call for us here is to trust in this Jesus.

John is called to weep no more, but to see. See who this Jesus is. He is the lion, and yet he is the slain lamb. And he is the one who is in control of all things.

He has the scroll. He knows what is going on in this world. Can you imagine seeing, being John, seeing this picture of awesomeness, of Jesus, the slain lamb, in control of all things, all powerful, all knowledge, and then going from there and choosing to worship anything else.

[17 : 27] As if anything else could satisfy or bring joy. Weep no more because nothing else will satisfy. No one will love you more. Nothing will bring joy.

No one has planned out the future for you. How can we see this picture of Jesus and chase anything except him? Weep no more. Be anxious no more.

Seek value nowhere else. Stress no more. Chase no more idols. Think that we can save our future without Jesus no more. Our Jesus knows all.

He has power over all. Now, this is not saying that we don't grieve. We don't have pain and loss and heartbreak. But we don't weep as if the world is just chaos around us.

This passage calls us to weep no more because Jesus is the mighty slaughtered lamb. So let's speak on the loudspeaker about his love. Let's marvel at his mercy.

[18 : 30] Let's show gratitude for his grace. Church, let's trust him and love him and praise him and adore him that he would choose us.

That he would choose me. That he would choose us to be his friends. This Jesus sees all that we've done.

Knows who we are and what we have done. He knows everything about us. And he still calls us to be in relationship with him. He calls us to be his friend.

Jesus is in control of all things as the slain lamb. The third point for us today is this shows us a vision of what reality is.

The praise that started with the elders and the creatures just directly around Jesus spreads out. Verse 11. Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels numbering thousands upon thousands and 10,000 times 10,000.

[19 : 35] Verse 13. I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the sea and on the sea. Sorry, and on the earth and under the sea. And all that is in them.

All of them praising God. Praising this Jesus. The praise of Jesus started around him. Spreads out to all of heaven. Spreads out to everything that ever is.

We could end the book of Revelation right here at chapter 5. It has showed us all of history and the future. A people desperate for a savior to come.

He has come. He has opened the scroll. And only Jesus can do that because he was slain. He has triumphed. And all that there is will praise him and acknowledge him that he is the lamb who sits on the throne to his praise and glory forever and ever.

This is the reality of the past, of the present, and the future. Jesus is enthroned. And all people, all creation will acknowledge him when he returns.

[20 : 39] President Trump has gathered great rallies. The AFL, the rugby league have just had finals where they've had lots of people. But they are so insignificant compared to the gatherings of Jesus.

All creation will gather to worship God and his lamb. The whole universe will acknowledge that God is good and loving and true.

And that his son has redeemed himself, a people from the powers of evil and destruction. It is a picture of the day when Jesus returns. When those who follow him will see him.

And rejoice and acknowledge that he is the lamb. But it is also the day when those who don't follow him, those who don't acknowledge that he is the Lord now, they will see and they will realize too late.

If you don't follow Jesus, if you don't see him as the slain lamb and Lord who has died for you, come talk to me.

[21 : 49] Get in contact with us at church. Email us at officeatsandpauls.org.au We would love to read the Bible with you so you can see that Jesus is the slain lamb who died because he loves you.

If you've come with a friend this morning, ask them to read the Bible with you so you can see the reality of this world that we live in. Until that day comes, what we do right now is important.

We gather week by week, in pandemic and out, online if we can't gather in person, to call each other to see, to behold this lamb who was slain.

We need this daily reminder as we do daily devotionals in the Bible to remind ourselves of the reality of what this world is so that we don't get tempted to just ignore it and pretend that everything is fine.

The outward appearance of Jesus as a weak slain lamb is strange. It is weak. It is not what our culture, not what any culture would see as strong.

[23 : 03] And yet it is this lamb who has all power and all knowledge. It is he who has been raised. And that even though there is political chaos, environmental chaos, economic chaos, family, chaos and pain every day, this slain lamb who has died for us is in control of all things.

He knows our tomorrow and we can trust him. One of my favorite types of videos on YouTube, when I see colorblind people get these glasses that can correct their vision.

Is anybody colorblind here? Nobody's colorblind? Okay. That's fine. I love seeing these videos on YouTube because they take a person who has only ever been able to see the world in dull, muted colors to see what the reality of life is around them.

My favorite ones of these are like 50-year-old dads. I've seen these videos and the family's got this big bundle of balloons with all of the colors, more than just these colors.

They've got blues and greens and reds. And you've got these dads. And I don't know, maybe it's just a Western kind of cultural thing. Or maybe there's just something stoic about dads.

[24 : 23] Dads don't show too much emotion. Everything's fine. We're in control of all things. And these dads get these glasses. And, you know, they suddenly, they can see real colors.

I invite you to go find these videos later. Oh, what color is this? Oh, that's orange. That's red. Oh, there's a difference between red and green. And look at the sky.

Look at the sunset. And suddenly, you see these people who are usually so stoic start crying because they've realized the reality of the world around them.

I've been missing out on seeing the beauty of the world around me. We are called to see. See who Jesus is.

And when we see him as the slain lamb, we are sliding on those glasses so that we can see the reality of the world around us. No longer is it just muted in color, dark and chaotic.

[25 : 25] The world struggling from day to day not to descend into chaos, but the world eagerly waiting on the slain lamb who rules all now to come back so that we can be with him.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you gave this vision to John and you have shown us this beautiful picture of your grace and love for us.

Your son slain to purchase us for yourself. Lord, help us on chaotic days to be reminded of Jesus that he is in control of all things now.

And Father, remind us on days when we feel strong to know our weakness so that we would depend upon you, Lord. Amen.