

## Revelation 1

- **Welcome & Opening Prayer**
- **Overview**
  - a. To cover all of Revelation in five sessions, we need to cover about five chapters per session, so that is moving along quickly at first glance. Yet, the chapters in Revelation are short compared to other New Testament books.
  - b. **I want you to really wrestle with this book.** I want you to suspend your preconceived notions about what this book is about and be open to discovering what it is about by reading and praying with it.
  - c. Please don't take what I suggest as the truth simply because I suggest it. Rather, wrestle with it, read it and read it again. Pray with it. Take what we cover here home and read it after we cover it here. Turn it and read it again. Apply it to your life and see what comes.
  - d. I have taught Revelation four times before this time and I find that I am just beginning to grasp this amazing, hopeful book that is the Revelation of Jesus Christ.
- **The Book of Revelation**
  - a. **It is a Prophetic book**
    1. The heart of the book is a Christian named John writing to the seven churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), calling them back to God. **A prophet acts out of God's love first and foremost: come back to me says God, for I love you!**
    2. I suggest that the Book of Revelation is not about the end of the world. Many have made predictions that this end would come and we have passed those dates repeatedly.
    3. Rather, I suggest that the world as we know it may never end. Once we get to Revelation 21 with the New Jerusalem, it unfolds onto the earth. Maybe the earth and all peoples of the earth will be transformed again and again.
    4. Moreover, think of the prayer, The Glory Be – “Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever, **world without end.**” We pray that the world will not end.
    5. **I think the book calls the followers of Jesus to turn away from empire and turn back to God then and now.**
    6. **The real battlefield in the Book of Revelation is our hearts that Jesus is trying to win back through this apocalyptic letter. That is where all our battles should be fought. I suggest that all the fanciful imagery is to get the attention of those in the seven churches of revelation who have accommodated their faith to the Roman Empire and to get our attention for when we accommodate our faith to anything else other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**
    7. While the author is John, the person who doing the “revealing” as we read in the first verse of the book, Rev 1:1, is Jesus Christ: he is calling these churches – and us in 2019 – out of empire, back to the Christian Gospel, back to God out of love.
    8. While this book is often titled “The Revelation of John” it is truly is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”

9. What has happened? Many disciples of Jesus in these seven churches are accommodating to the Roman Empire where they believe that one can follow Jesus and enjoy the benefits of empire at the same time. Jesus say, "This is not possible, for you cannot serve two masters, for you will love one and hate the other."
10. Jesus is quite clear: this is apostasy, it is sinful behavior and Jesus is calling all these disciples to conversion, to repent, to change their ways. If they don't change their ways, they will face the peril that "is about to happen soon" (Rev 1:1). I suggest that this peril is simply the fruit of sin: destruction by God of idols and idolatry. The wages of sin are death, and Revelation frames it in apocalyptic imagery through liturgy, in this case, the liturgy of the Mass. Revelation is framed in a Eucharistic Liturgy.
11. Jesus has John write of these fanciful battles – through liturgical symbols – to let the Christians know that the tapestry of being that is the center of reality is not the Roman Empire against which they have been judging the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
12. Take, for example, **the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16** where the vineyard owner works out a just wage with the workers who start at 6 a.m. Then, the owner hires workers at 9 am, 12 pm, 3 pm, and 5 pm. And, at pay time, everyone, including those who worked only one hour, get paid the same as those who worked 12, 9, or 6 hours, bearing the burden of the day's heat. The ones who worked 12 hours scream, "It is not fair" and the vineyard owner, who is God, says, "Look, I paid you what we agreed on. If you are upset because I choose to be generous, that is your problem, because maybe you are greedy and envious of my generosity." The point: the ones who scream it is not fair are judging the Gospel of Jesus Christ (extravagant generosity through self-sacrificing love) against the tapestry of the Gospel of Capitalism (you get what you earn – I pulled myself up by my bootstraps so they can too – God helps those who help themselves (this is Shakespeare and found nowhere in the bible)) and finding the Gospel of Jesus coming up short. What is Jesus teaching here? Make sure that you judge everything – including the economic system in which you make your livelihood – against the Gospel of Jesus Christ or you will fall into idolatry, making something that is not God to be a god and it will suck the life out of you, leaving you barren and in shambles – the fruit of sin.
13. Rather, the tapestry of being, the center of reality, is the Christian Gospel against which all things are judged and fall short.
14. The prophetic aspect of Revelation is saying, "What are you using as your standard of being? Whom or what are you following?"
15. The prophetic aspect of Revelation is also saying, "It is much easier to worship Jesus and believe in teachings than it is to follow Jesus. To follow Jesus, could lead to suffering and cost me my life."
16. **The prophetic book of Revelation is challenging the Christians then and today**, as all prophetic books challenge those to whom they speak out of love, to realize that they are falling into idolatry and idols suck the life out of you, but you often don't realize it until it is too late.
17. **Jesus realizes that these churches are small** and the tide of the Roman Empire flowed steadily against them. What worried him, through John, above all was that **there were some Christians in these churches who felt that they might swim with the tide. To Jesus, this is madness, for the wages of sin are death and destruction without new life.**

b. What is Empire?

1. Empire is when a society, often led by a strong, charismatic leader (dictator) focuses only on itself. Empire puts itself at the center of reality at the expense of all those around it.
2. Empire seeks one thing: self-preservation in lavish luxury.
3. Empire takes all it can get through war, oppression, brutal violence, and exploitation. It truly believes that the gods of the universe have called them to live this way, at the expense of the countries around it or anywhere else in the world, so that the empire may plunder these countries for their people as slaves and resources as capital.
4. Empires also plunder the meek and mild of their own societies, often turning the middle and peasant classes into poor, enslaved classes along with all the enslaved peoples whom they capture in war and import into their colonial areas.
5. **But what empires are blind to is that all their exploitation, plunder, and enslavement is never enough.** Empire creates addictions where you must have another hit of what makes you feel good, until you have to have multiple hits just to begin to feel good or even get out of bed. This is addiction and it takes life, because empires worship gods that are not God and these gods can only take life. They can never give life.
6. **To quote St. Teresa of Avila, a doctor of the church, “Solo Dios basta”** -> “Only God satisfies.” Only God can satisfy the longings of the human heart.
7. **This is what a prophet does:** reminds people using extravagant means like fanciful liturgical battles to get the attention of a Christian people who are blind, who are in sin.
8. After a while, Empire literally makes itself god or thinks that it is divine.
9. We see this in all Empires of the world. In the Book of Revelation, the empire is the Roman Empire. The author uses the titles of “Babylon” and “Egypt” to refer to those empires, alluding to their imperial ways but these are symbols that refer to the Roman Empire.
10. The Beast in the Book of Revelation is Caesar, the Roman Emperor. It could also be the Roman Empire, for this Beast destroys and plunders everyone and everything it touches, because it’s reason for being is self-preservation. The number 666 is simply one number less than 777 which is perfection for Judaism. And Jesus, if you translate his name into a number, it is 888.
11. What does God do with empires? Anything that makes itself like God becomes an idol and just like God did with the empires of Egypt and later Babylon, God crushes them, destroying them, leaving them in shambles like the Third Reich where other nations of the world feast on it.
12. John is urging these churches to resist the Roman Empire at all costs. Ironically, victory is won through defeat. The victim is the victor as we will see again and again in Revelation. After all, Christians are disciples of the slain Lamb in Rev. 4 – the disciple should expect the same fate as the Master.

c. **It is an Apocalyptic book**

1. The word “apocalypse” or “apocalyptic” means “revelation,” “to reveal” or “to remove the veil.”
2. Daniel, for example, is an apocalyptic book of the Old Testament. In Daniel, like Revelation, the author through visions paints these wild celestial battles between the forces of good and evil in the form of liturgy.
3. **Liturgy** simply means “public work done on behalf of the community.”
4. **Christian Liturgy is the public work that God does on behalf of the world:** the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. This liturgy, this work, is going on right now and will be forever.
5. The author of Revelation knows the Old Testament quite well and alludes to it in most verses of Revelation.
6. Revelation quotes Daniel extensively and alludes to many other OT books like Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah.
7. **In an apocalyptic book, the oppressed people who are faithful to God or Jesus Christ in the case of Revelation, cry out to God, asking when God will vindicate them. When will God bring justice?**
8. The bulk of the Book of Revelation (4:1 – 20:15) is the story of creation and salvation. It is the story of God as the Creator and what God has done and will do to any society that puts itself in the place of God or thinks that it is divine.
9. Furthermore, Revelation is God pulling back the veil on the Roman Empire that uses deceit, noise, and violence to paint itself as a powerful empire, just like Nazi Germany – the Third Reich, which is another empire that God crushed and left in ruins despite its delusions of grandeur.

d. **How does God fight in the Book of Revelation? What is Armageddon?**

1. **In Revelation, just as in the entire New Testament, the victim, Jesus Christ, is the victor.**
2. The great final battle to which Revelation alludes is, many biblical scholars argue, the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Paschal Mystery.
3. God wins by losing. The way that God fights and the followers of God in Revelation (and the entire New Testament) is through the cross, through nonviolent love. The early church embraced nonviolence as a way of life until the Emperor Constantine around 311 AD began to change the Christian Church, turning the cross into a sword, a weapon.

4. The followers of the Lamb fight by “washing their robes white in the blood of the lamb” (Rev. 7:14). This is witnessing to Jesus Christ – the word “martyr” in Greek means witness – and it brings life through death, because of the faithful witness of the Lamb and the Lamb’s followers.
5. In Hebrew, Armageddon is a real twist on “the valley of Megiddo” where many battles in the history of Israel took place. Thus, it is not a final battle, but a place.

e. How does the Book understand Jesus Christ?

1. Revelation never refers to Jesus as θεός or “Theos” in Greek which means “God.” Revelation refers to the Creator God as God and that is it.
2. Revelation refers to Jesus as the Word of God, the Lamb, and other titles but never God. Yet, Revelation does offer the Lamb the same praise as One who sits on the throne.
3. In Rev 1:1, the author states that this revelation is from Jesus Christ which God gave him, making a clear distinction between Jesus and God.
4. Chapter 4 of Revelation is all about the One who sits on the throne whom all creation adores and worships. To worship anyone or anything who is not God is idolatry and that is what much of the world is doing with the Beast. Revelation 4 is clearing saying that we are to only worship the One who sits on the throne: God.
5. Chapter 5 of Revelation is a liturgy of redemption where the Lamb is praised as the only one who can break open the seals of the great scroll. Why? Because the lamb is worthy to do this because he was slain and offered his life, his blood, his heart for all the peoples of the world to free them from sin. So, the Lamb receives the same praise as God. But Revelation 5 never calls Jesus God.
6. I don’t think that the author of Revelation wrote the Gospel of John or vice-versa. Why?
7. In the **Gospel of John, let’s read 1:1-4**. How does this Gospel see the Word of God who is Jesus Christ? He is God just like God the Father is God. The Gospel of John calls Jesus God. And, as 1:3 tells us, Jesus is the Creator of the world in John’s Gospel, not God the Father.
8. **Let’s read John 10:17-18** where Jesus says that he has the power to lay down his life – which we all have – but he has the power to take it up again. Only God has that power and Jesus claims to be God in the Gospel of John. He makes no such claim in Revelation.
9. In the Gospel of John, there is no blood atonement. Meaning? There is nothing in the Gospel of John that supports the notion that Jesus Christ died for our sins or ransomed us from death through his blood.
10. In Revelation 1:5 and 5:9, it clearly states that through Jesus’ blood, we are freed from our sins.
11. Thus, I suggest that the author of the Book of Revelation is closer to Paul and his letters, which speak of Jesus saving us through his blood, as we will see as we read Revelation.

**f. Author of the book, form, & when was it written?**

1. The author of the book is John and many think that this is the same John who is named in the Gospel of John. I suggest that this is unlikely the same John.
2. The book is written in the form of a letter and its closest affinity in the New Testament are the letters written by Paul where he writes asking a particular church to change its ways, to turn back to Christ.
3. It was probably written in 81-96 AD when Domitian was the Roman Emperor and the imperial cult in the seven churches of Asia Minor was thriving. The imperial cult was the worship, the offering of incense, to Caesar, the Emperor as divine. To not do this for Christians, who were considered atheists by the Roman Empire because they did not worship Caesar as god or the Roman gods, meant persecution and often death as we will see in the Book of Revelation. It is like the professional athletes who kneel during the national anthem before a game trying to call attention to oppression of minority peoples: it brings tremendous persecution if you challenge the status quo of society. It comes at a great cost.

**g. How does the Book of Revelation understand salvation?**

1. Revelation sees salvation as a paradox where our names are written in the Book of Life because of Jesus' great love for us on the cross through his blood (Rev. 1:5).
2. This is held in tension with our being judged by our deeds (20:12-15) where those who don't make the cut are thrown in the pool of fire.
3. Parts of Revelation speak of limited salvation.
4. Other parts of Revelation speak of universal salvation.
5. We will note these as we read them.

- **Outline of the Book of Revelation**
  - a. Prologue and Greeting 1:1-8
  - b. Letters to the Seven Churches 1:9 – 3:22
  - c. Liturgy in Praise of Creation & the Creator 4:1-11
  - d. Liturgy in Praise of Redemption & the Lamb 5:1-14
  - e. The Seven Seals, Trumpets, & Plagues with Interludes 6:1-16:21 (this is what John refers to as “what must happen soon” in Rev. 1:1. I suggest it is the wages of sin which is suffering and death).
  - f. The Punishment of Babylon (Rome) & the Destruction of the Pagan Nations 17:1 – 20:15
  - g. The New Jerusalem, The New Creation 21:1 – 22:5
  - h. Epilogue 22:6-21
  
- **Revelation 1**
  - a. What do you notice?
  - b. John’s intent: to prepare these Christian communities, the servants of God, for an imminent crisis that John is willing to provoke by calling out the sin in each church and by encouraging them to persevere in the Way of the Cross, the Way of Love, the Way of Salvation.
  - c. This is a pastoral letter that is meant to be read in the worship services of all these Churches – at Mass which the Christians celebrated on Saturday evenings then. It is meant to be read in one hearing from start to finish. The purpose is to build the disciples up, to turn back to God, to change their ways for the coming persecution that they will face.
  - d. John states that something is to happen soon. I suggest that this is the call to conversion and if we do not heed it soon, changing our ways, then we will face the peril of unrepented sin which is suffering and death.
  - e. Notice the beatitude in Rev. 1:3 that begins with “Blessed is the one...” There are seven beatitudes in Revelation. Seven is an interesting number in Revelation. It means perfection like the seven days of creation or seven sacraments.
  - f. 1:3, this is a prophetic message and prophetic messages are meant to be heeded or followed.
  - g. We are freed from sin by Jesus’ blood.
  - h. Patmos is probably a Roman penal colony where John is imprisoned because he proclaimed God’s word (not Caesar’s word) and gave witness to Jesus and not Caesar. This comes at a cost and that cost is the cross.
  - i. These are seven real Christian Churches in Asia Minor where there is an imperial temple of worship in 6 of the 7 cities. That is a problem for Christians who are expected to offer incense to Caesar in them.
  - j. Rev. 1:5-7 is about Jesus Christ, his fidelity unto death, victory over death by embracing the cross, God’s answer to Caesar’s (and the world’s) arrogance. Jesus is the source of hope for Christians about to face great persecution. They truly have reason for patient endurance.
  - k. Through his death and resurrection and our baptism into his death and resurrection, Jesus has conferred his priestly role on all the baptized, making us all priests (Rev. 1:6), calling us to exercise this sanctifying role through our witness in every aspect of life.

- l. The person described here is Jesus and it is quite similar to the son of man described in Daniel 10.
- m. How does he fight? He fights with the sword of his mouth, the word of God.
- n. Jesus tells John, who is trembling in fear, to write down what he has seen, what is happening, and what is to happen afterwards.
- o. I suggest that the battle and final battle that is going on throughout Revelation is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God is not subject to time. Rather, time is a creature, for God made time as we know it. It is the battle of the cross against the temptation to fight like the world fights, seeking self-preservation.
- p. Like the prophet Daniel in Dan 10:8-9, John is terrified by this vision and responds, like most prophets, in great fear and trembling but Jesus reassures him that this will not happen on John's power but on Jesus' power.
- q. In the prophets, they usually write, "Thus says Yahweh..." Here, John will write, "Thus says Jesus Christ and describe him in a particular way for each of the seven churches.

- **Revelation 2**

- a. Notice the pattern of each letter. It is similar to the OT prophets.
- b. Each church will receive a verdict from Jesus the Lord of All Creation that includes praise and blame for most and only praise for one church.
- c. The line at the end of each letter, "**Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear** what the Spirit says to the churches" probably comes from the line that Jesus shares after he tells one of his first parables, The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:9, Matthew 13:9, Luke 8:8).
- d. **The Letter to the Church at Ephesus** – this was the largest, most privileged city in Asia at the time, because of its maritime business. It contained the Temple of Artemis (Diana) and a temple to worship the Emperor Domitian (emperor 81-96 AD). Paul spends three years in Ephesus (Acts 19-20) making it a base of evangelization from which he sends out evangelists and probably writes at least one of his letters from this city. Paul also puts forward the criteria for true apostles: "The signs of an apostle were performed among you with all endurance, signs and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Cor 12:12).

- 1. How is Jesus described?



2. What are they praised for? Who are the Nicolaitans? What are they doing?
  3. For what do they need to repent? Does Jesus threaten them if they don't repent? Orthodoxy is no substitute for orthopraxis.
  4. What will the victor receive? What OT verses/story is this alluding to?
- e. **The Letter to the Church at Smyrna** – present day Izmir in Turkey that is 35 miles north of Ephesus and one of the most prosperous cities in Asia at the time. In 26 AD, a temple to Emperor Tiberius (the one who was emperor when Jesus dies and the one who renames the Sea of Galilee after himself) was built here. It had many Jews who were apparently antagonistic to the followers of Jesus. It was destroyed in 600 BC and rebuilt in 300 BC so it has a history of death and rebirth. “Ten days” may refer to Daniel 1:12 where there will be a time of testing for 10 days where Daniel and his companions are given vegetables and water instead of food that violates their Jewish kosher diet.
1. How is Jesus described?
  2. What are they praised for or called to do? What does Jesus mean by them being “rich”?
  3. Are they called to repent or persevere in faithfulness, even unto death?
  4. What will the victor receive? What is the second death in 2:11 that may be referencing 20:14 and 21:8? Could it be annihilation that follows judgment? Might it refer to Matthew 10:28, “And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.” Gehenna is described, in Jewish writings, as *Valley of Hinnom*, a ravine south of Jerusalem, figuratively, a place of final judgment and fire for the punishment of the wicked.

f. **The Letter to the Church at Pergamum** – lay 40 miles north of Smyrna coming under Roman control in 133 BC, functioning as the administrative control for the province of Asia. It was the center of the imperial cult in Asia (emperor worship).

1. How is Jesus described?
2. For what are they praised and what person is praised?
3. For what do they need to repent? What is the root sin here?
4. What will the victor receive?

g. **The Letter to the Church at Thyatira** – located in a broad valley, forty miles southeast of Pergamum, this city gets the longest and possibly most difficult letter of all the churches, which may explain why the victor gets quite a prize of the morning star who is probably Jesus himself. Thyatira was a trading center also notable for its trade guilds (metal workers, wool dyers) that were also associated with pagan worship, like eating foods sacrificed to idols. Jezebel is a metaphorical name for a political rival of John in Revelation who is seducing Christians to participate in idolatry as we find the historical Jezebel doing in 1 Kings 16-21. Paul in 1 Cor 8:1-13; 10:20-30 takes a nuanced position that largely opposes this. John in Revelation asks the question: to what extent might Christians conform to the prevailing culture of idolatry for the sake of economic survival or social acceptance? John's response: not at all!

1. How is Jesus described? Have we heard this before in Revelation?
2. For what are they praised?

3. For what do they need to repent?
  
4. What will the victor receive? Psalm 2:8-9 and Matthew 28:18 are alluded to here about authority. The faithful Christians will share in the authority of Jesus Christ.

- **Revelation 3**

- a. **Letter to the Church at Sardis** – lay about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira. It was, like Ephesus, a commercial city, with a temple to the goddess Cybele. It had a large Jewish community. It suffered a catastrophic earthquake in 17 AD. The city had a history of being strongly fortified but was captured twice by stealth. This is the first letter where the works are not praised but critiqued as lacking or half-hearted at best. The Christians here have a spark of life that needs to be stoked, otherwise, it may disappear. Jesus encourages them to dig deep to find the fervor of their first faith (like Ephesus). Notice how Christianity here is not about right belief (a modern concept) but right behavior/discipleship that is only demonstrated by how it is lived by following Jesus. If they fail to repent, Jesus threatens to come like a thief in the night – stealth – and confront them.

1. How is Jesus described? How is it connected to the description of Sardis in 3:1?
  
2. Are they praised? Or, are a few of them praised? Why?
  
3. Why do they need to repent?
  
4. What will the victor receive?

b. **Letter to the Church at Philadelphia** – lay 30 miles southeast of Sardis and suffered greatly in the earthquake (17 AD). The Jews here (attested by St. Ignatius of Antioch) were openly hostile to the Christians, shutting the synagogue door to them, expelling them, which may be a clue to the open door that Jesus mentions. Jesus Christ, not the Jews of this city, holds the key of David to the household of God. While they hold little power, Christ works through us at this best when we are weak. Jesus making the Jews come and fall at the feet of Christians may be Jesus’ power working to convert the Jews. Thus, the encouragement to hang in there. The Christians in this church are probably experiencing fierce persecution with some being martyred. This is the only letter where we find the love of Jesus Christ expressed quite directly, “...I love you.” Because these Christians have been faithful and greatly persecuted, Jesus will keep them safe through the tribulation coming in Rev. 7:14, which is how Jesus works best: through our weakness that is faithful, just like his Father worked best through Jesus’s passion and death on the cross. The Philadelphia Christians have been faithful to that journey, the same journey to which we all are called. To be clear, God’s faithfulness to the weak and persecuted does not mean exclusion from it. Rather, it means divine support and love amidst it as Jesus received in Gethsemane when God sent an angel (Luke 22:43) to strengthen Jesus so that he could bear the horror and agony of the cross. What do they and we receive for faithfulness? They receive names that no other churches receive – see Rev. 3:12.

1. How is Jesus powerfully described quoting Isaiah 22:22? Why?
2. For what are they praised? What does Jesus say in 3:9 that is so beautiful?
3. Are they to repent of anything or persevere?
4. What will the victor receive for faithfulness?

c. **Letter to the Church at Laodicea** – 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia in the Lycus valley, it was a major commercial city with a banking center, cloth and carpet manufacturers, and the seat of a medical school known for its healing eye salve. Laodicea was an opulent city that rose from the ruins of the earthquake in 60 AD without the help of an imperial grant. So, the searing adjectives – wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked – that Jesus uses to describe it are in stark contrast to what it’s known for: powerful, stately, rich banking businesses, keen eye sight, and fine clothes. Simply put, the Christians at Laodicea are spiritually bankrupt, for Jesus accuses them of only being Christian in name, which is not a Christian. Only Jesus can give true wealth: faith in him, which is what he offers the victor –

a living relationship with Jesus where the victor sits at his throne for having won the victory of the cross. The one who surrenders to the cross is the victor. The images that Jesus uses in 3:18-19 are meant to heal the tragic blindness of their hearts. The severity of the threat by Jesus reflects his deep love and concern for them, because if they don't repent and change, they are headed for annihilation. The One who loves the weak, faithful Philadelphians also loves the lukewarm Laodiceans just as much and maybe even more so, because the latter group of Christians are lost and don't know it. There is a Eucharistic flavor to the invitation issued by Jesus here that foreshadows the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, which is the fullness of the communion of love and intimacy with Jesus, in Rev. 19:9. The only way to get into this Wedding Feast is through a love relationship with Jesus that leads us to the cross, like "...gold refined by fire..." (3:18). The love of Christ may inflict pain but it never does damage. Rather, it can heal if we let go of that to which we cling as indispensable.

1. How is Jesus described? Is he the opposite of these Christians?
  2. Are they praised for anything?
  3. What is at the heart of their repentance? Does their Christian faith make a difference in their lives?
  4. What does the victor receive?
- **Revelation 4 – A Liturgy Celebrating Creation & the Creator**
    - a. What is happening in this chapter? What is the purpose of it? It follows the seven letters to the churches that often call out the churches for idolatry – making something in creation to be God that only enslaves us – which is wrong worship. Now the heavenly voice will show John and all the hearers/readers of this letter what right worship is about.
    - b. This is a new vision in heaven (and for the rest of the book) that differs from Rev. 2-3 that was on earth.
    - c. This is a liturgy in praise of creation. The liturgy worships God the Creator that this chapter uses many images from the Old Testament to describe God.
    - d. 4:2, "...on the throne sat One..." occurs 12 times in Revelation. The jewels of jasper, carnelian and emerald give off the brilliant radiance of God. John is taking a direct shot at the emperor who sits on the throne in Rome, saying, real authority belongs to God.

- e. Note that there is no direct vision of God (Ezekiel 1:26-28) only the effects of looking at the One seated on the throne. There are no details describing God with human features. The brilliance of the One on the throne shows and conceals God's being in mystery.
- f. 4:3, "halo" can also be translated as a "rainbow" recalling God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:12-17) about God as judge mindful of his mercy.
- g. 4:4, 24 elders could be the 24 classes of OT priests in 1 Chr 24:1-19. They could be the 12 tribes of Israel plus the 12 apostles of Jesus. The elders have the cultic role of worship, of praising God. They are also kings or queens (we are not told their gender) because they wear crowns. They represent the "royal house of priests" (1:6) on earth who are all the baptized Christians. After their "Amen, Hallelujah" in 19:4, they disappear because all the Christians will enter the New Jerusalem.
- h. 4:5, the thunder and lightning remind us of God revealing God's self to the People of Israel in Exodus 19:6. The thunder and lightning are symbols of God's glory. The prophet Ezekiel has a similar vision in Eze 1:13-14.
- i. 4:6, the sea of glass like crystal may be the waters above the firmament in Gen. 1:8 and Psalm 104:3. The sea was always feared by the Hebrew people because it often flooded them and killed many people. God was the only one who could control the rising waters. For the sea to be like glass means that God has controlled it and is keeping it at bay from the people. This is the same sea of glass mingled with fire in Rev. 15:2.
- j. 4:6-9, The four living creatures
  1. Notice that they are in the center of and around the throne, so they are angels in the form of these creatures.
  2. These are the same four creatures in Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel chapter 1.
  3. Many Catholics (originating with Irenaeus in the second century) believe that these four creatures represent the four Gospel evangelists or writers.
  4. Rather, a better suggestion is that they represent all of creation in the following manner:
    - (a) The lion represents the wild beasts.
    - (b) The calf or ox represents domestic animals.
    - (c) The human represents humankind.
    - (d) The eagle represents the birds.
  5. They have one role day and night: to praise God which is the vocation of all the creatures that God made – to praise God. To quote St. Augustine, "The vocation of the creature is to praise the Creator." We all praise God by being the creatures that has destined us to be.
  6. The six wings probably allude to the angels in Isaiah 6:2.
  7. The holy, holy, holy probably alludes to Isaiah 6:3. It is the song of nature praising its creator – see Psalm 19:1-6.
- h. 4:9, glory and honor probably allude to Psalms 29:1 and 96:7.
- i. 4:9, who lives for ever and ever probably alludes to Daniel 4:31 and 12:7.
- j. 4:10, the 24 elders fall down (their cultic role) before God and throw down their crowns (vassal kings literally threw down their crowns when entering the presence of a greater King

establishing that their crown and glory comes from God alone), when the four creatures praise God which is 24/7, exclaiming, “Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created.”

- k. 4:11, Lord our God -> may be a retort to alleged form of address to the Emperor Domitian, “Dominus et deus noster” in Latin. The point: to fall down and worship a human being is idolatry – or leading a life where I believe that all providence is from an economic system, my job, country, or a person like the Christians in Laodicea were living – and sinful because I am worshipping and living as if something that is not God is truly God and that is slavery that takes life. Only God is worthy of this.
- l. Chapter 4 of Revelation is showing the seven churches and us, rather than telling us, what true worship is about. The letters in chapters 2-3 have been going after one thing: idolatry that is worshipping a false god, even if I am not bowing down to it; rather, I am living as if this god gives me all that I need. Only God the Creator can do that.

- **Revelation 5 – A Liturgy Celebrating Redemption & the Redeemer**

- a. What is happening in this chapter? What is its purpose?
- b. 5:1, the One who sits on the throne holds the scroll in his right hand – the hand of authority. This scroll could be the Book of Life but it is probably God’s preordained plan for the world to be carried out by the Lamb and his followers.
- c. 5:2, the angel announces the question to which there is no answer: who is worthy to open this scroll?
- d. 5:3, quite reminiscent of Paul’s hymn in Philippians 2:10, there is no one in heaven, on earth, or under the earth who can open the scroll.
- e. 5:4-5, John sheds tears because there is no one to open this scroll. Yet, an elder in heaven tells him to not weep because the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (a Davidic warrior image – see Gen. 49:9-10) has triumphed enabling him to open the scroll. The book of Revelation gives us the impression that a figure like King David is about to appear.
- f. 5:6-7, Instead, we get the opposite: a Lamb standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and elders that seemed to have been slain. This was God’s preordained plan all along. The Lamb “triumphed” by surrendering to the cross. From now on in Revelation, John’s title for Jesus is the Lamb. The key is that the Lamb was slain like the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12). The Lamb has seven horns – which are symbols of power of the victorious Christ won on the cross. The seven eyes may represent the fullness of knowledge for he sees all things with his fiery eyes (1:14).

- g. John is looking at the place where the Lamb is supposed to appear. Instead, he gets a profound reversal when the Lamb appears.
- h. 5:8-10, When the slain Lamb takes the scroll from the right hand of the One on the throne, it is a transfer of power and this is no small detail. For the One who sits on the throne to transfer power and authority to the Lamb, it reveals the heart of God's plan: the world would come to know the One on the throne through the slain Lamb, the Son, the Word of God.
- i. Because of this, the living creatures and the elders – who represent all of creation – now worship the Lamb, following on the heels of their worshipping the One on the throne who created all things. From this point forward, the Lamb and the One on the throne will be more closely linked.
- j. The elders who are also priests offer the prayers of the “holy ones” the faithful “saints” of God. These elders take on the priestly role asking God to intercede for the holy ones. This role in Judaism belonged to the archangels before the throne.
- k. 5:9, they sing a new song that speaks of the new life for all from the slain Lamb. “Newness” is a recurring theme in Revelation: new name (2:17; 3:12), new heaven and earth (21:1), and the New Jerusalem (22:10).
- l. 5:9, the Lamb purchased/bought for God peoples of all tribes, tongues, and nation through his blood. To “buy” or “ransom” is a Pauline word (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Gal 3:13; 4:5) that is used similarly in Revelation.
- m. 5:13, The paralleling of God and the Lamb in Rev. 4 & 5 conveys in subtle but unmistakable manner that creation and redemption are the center pieces of God's work, that is, of God's liturgy: the public work that God does on behalf of all creation.
- n. The same worship offered to God is offered to the Lamb that makes a powerful statement: if the same worship offered to God is given to the Lamb, what does that say about the Lamb? See Rev. 7:10; 21:22; 22:1, 3.
- o. Redemption is almighty God manifests his power on the cross. In the cross, the blood of the Lamb, God offers forgiveness and holds out salvation to all people of the world.
- p. The coupling of these two liturgies in Rev. 4 & 5, including the way that redemption is described in Rev. 5, asks the question, could the author of Revelation be a disciple of Paul? There are strong Pauline themes of redemption – the Lamb purchasing freedom from the captivity of sin – in Revelation.
- q. Paul would be fine with the Lamb receiving the same praise as God the Father because he won the victory by becoming the victim.