

"THE OMNICOMPETENT LAMB"

I. Introduction

- A. We human beings are confronted by many problems in this world.
1. We should be thankful that, because of God's common grace, we are able to mitigate the effects of these problems to varying degrees.
 2. Nevertheless, the curse that hangs over the world due to sin is not something that human power will ever be able to overcome.
 3. One would have to be omniscient to solve everything that is wrong with the world.
 4. It is true that there are people who claim to be omniscient, and who believe this entitles them to do whatever is necessary to secure and exert power.
 5. But their unworthiness is exposed by the fact that they are willing to employ evil means to achieve their so-called noble ends.
- B. The good news of Easter is that the risen Christ truly is omniscient, and he has gained a sweeping and definitive victory over sin and death.
1. Revelation 5 is a visionary depiction of this victory.
 2. It is the second part of a vision that began in chapter 4, where John saw God seated on his heavenly throne and reigning over all creation.
 3. Here in chapter 5, the dominant images are a sealed scroll in God's hand, and a Lamb that had been slain but is now alive.
 4. While no one in all creation is qualified to open the scroll, the Lamb is able to do so.

5. This is the basis of our hope as Christians.

II. The Problem to Be Overcome

- A. The vision in our text opens by presenting a problem that needs to be overcome.
 1. The problem centers upon a scroll that is sealed with seven seals.
 2. This scroll is a central feature in the rest of the book of Revelation.
 3. Chapters 6 through 8 tell us what happens when the seven seals are opened, and the remainder of Revelation is really just a further elaboration of this.
- B. As far as what the scroll symbolizes, there are several Old Testament passages that form the background for this image.
 1. One such passage is Ezekiel 2 and 3, where the prophet Ezekiel sees a scroll that is filled with words of lamentation and woe on the front and the back.
 2. That scroll was a symbol of the message that Ezekiel was commanded to speak to the people of Israel because of their rebellion against God.
 3. In the book of Ezekiel, the scroll is a symbol of the judgment that lies in store for the wicked and disobedient.
- C. Another Old Testament passage that forms the backdrop for the scroll in our text is Daniel 7.
 1. In that passage, the prophet Daniel has a vision of God's heavenly courtroom in which the opening up of scrolls brings judgment upon God's enemies and deliverance for God's people.

2. The same thing happens when the scroll in Revelation is opened up in chapters 6 through 8.
 3. The opening of the scroll brings judgment upon the wicked, while those who have received God's protective seal on their foreheads are brought safely through that judgment.
- D. One more Old Testament passage that comes to mind in connection with the scroll in Revelation 5 is Daniel 12.
1. In that chapter, the prophet Daniel is told that there will be a general resurrection of the just and the unjust at the end of history.
 2. The just will awake to everlasting life, and the unjust will awake to shame and everlasting contempt.
 3. Though Daniel wants to know more about the timing and details of this, he is told that he is to "shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end." (v. 4)
- E. In light of this Old Testament background, we can conclude that the scroll in Revelation 5 is a symbol of God's eternal purpose for all history.
1. The scroll represents God's comprehensive plan to bring judgment upon this rebellious world and to save those whom he has graciously appointed to eternal life.
 2. The fact that God's plan is symbolized as something that has been written down on a scroll tells us that this plan is fixed and unchangeable.
 3. All the events that unfold in our world are the outworking of God's eternal purpose.
 4. The image of the scroll also tells us that history has an appointed end.

5. Everything that happens is moving history towards its climactic goal.
- F. Another significant detail about the scroll is that it has writing on both its front and back.
1. Ancient scrolls typically only had writing on one side.
 2. The fact that every part of this scroll has writing on it indicates that everything that unfolds across history has been determined by God's eternal decree.
 3. Nothing is outside of God's control.
 4. Nothing has been left to chance.
 5. Nothing can be added to God's plan.
 6. God's eternal decree deals with every particular, even down to the lifespan of a sparrow and the number of hairs on your head.
 7. The whole course of history has been determined according to the perfect wisdom of God.
- G. The problem presented by the scroll that John sees in his vision is that it is sealed with seven seals.
1. In the book of Revelation, the number seven symbolizes fullness.
 2. There are seven seals because the scroll stands for the entire period when the redemptive work of God is contending against the sin and evil of the present age.
- H. In the ancient world, scrolls were often sealed in order to ensure that the contents were only seen by those who had the authority to open them.

1. But John says that no one in all creation can be found who is worthy to open the seals of this scroll.
2. This is a problem because, as long as this scroll remains sealed, God's plan will remain unrevealed and unexecuted.
3. No mere creature can put God's plan into effect, not even the mighty angel who asks, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"
4. This tells us that nothing in this world has the power to advance God's purposes for history.
5. As the 19th century Presbyterian pastor James Ramsey explains, "Though all the political powers, and the accumulated wisdom of the world, all its wealth and influence of every kind should combine to advance these spiritual interests, they could of themselves accomplish nothing more than the weak, and foolish, and despised things of the world. It is hard for men to be persuaded of this. Yet nothing can be more certain... What can creature power do toward removing the real hindrances to the gospel, as found in the natural corruption of the human heart?... The very blessings [God's kingdom] brings [men] regard as burdens, and despise. Every passion, appetite, desire, and emotion of the natural heart bars it against the entrance of this kingdom; and all the habits of thought and action, all the forces that control and move the social and political energies of the world, are leagued in stern opposition to [God's kingdom]." [289]
6. It is folly to depend on any created power to advance the interests of the kingdom of God.
7. We are not able to build God's kingdom any more than we are able to save ourselves from God's just judgment.
8. John clearly understands this.

9. This is why he weeps.
 10. In the words of Vern Poythress, John “weeps because he senses the importance of this scroll (v. 4). The destiny of John, of the church, of the universe itself hangs in the balance over the question of whether someone can open the scroll.” [108-109]
- I. The impossibility of the scroll being opened until someone worthy to open it can be found tells us that God’s plan of redemption is only made known and understood once it has been accomplished.
1. This is why the writers of the New Testament refer to this plan as a mystery that was kept hidden in ages past but has been revealed now that Christ has come.
 2. Because the plan involves the redemption of a portion of the human race, it can only be put into effect by the one who provides for that redemption.
 3. Because the plan involves the renewal of this sin-cursed world, it can only be put into effect by the one who has conquered sin and death.

III. The Overcoming of the Problem

- A. We turn now to the second part of our passage, where we see how the problem that is presented by the sealed scroll is overcome.
1. As John is weeping, one of the elders says to him, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”
 2. “Lion of the tribe of Judah” is a messianic title, drawn from Jacob’s prophetic blessing of his son Judah in Genesis 49:9-10.

3. The name Judah gives this title clear royal associations, and the image of a lion attests to the Messiah's great power.
 4. "Root of David" is another messianic title, drawn from Isaiah 11, where the Messiah is described as both "a shoot from the stump of Jesse" and "the root of Jesse." (vs. 1, 10)
 5. In that prophetic oracle, the name Jesse stands for David, because Jesse was the father of King David.
 6. The fact that Jesus is described as both a *shoot* of Jesse and the *root* of Jesse testifies to Jesus's two natures.
 7. In his human nature, he is the shoot, or offspring, of Jesse.
 8. He was born as a true human being, descended from the line of David.
 9. But in his divine nature, he is the root, or source, of Jesse's covenant line.
 10. He was appointed from all eternity to be the one Mediator of the covenant of grace.
 11. Without him, there would not be a covenant line.
- B. After the mention of these great messianic titles, we would expect that John would turn and see some mighty figure.
1. But instead, he sees a Lamb.
 2. The Lamb is standing and active, so it is clearly alive.
 3. Yet John also says that the Lamb appeared "as though it had been slain."

4. This tells us that this Lamb is none other than the crucified and risen Christ.
 5. Jesus is depicted as a lamb because he is the true Passover lamb.
 6. At the time of the exodus, the blood of the Passover lamb was what shielded the people of Israel from the judgment that was unleashed upon the land of Egypt.
 7. In the same way, Jesus delivered his people from judgment by offering himself up as a substitutionary sacrifice upon the cross.
- C. The elder tells John that the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll because he has *conquered*.
1. This brings to mind the phrase, "The one who conquers," which is repeated throughout the messages given to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3.
 2. In those messages, as Jesus describes the blessings that lie in store for his people in heaven, he repeatedly says that these blessings are for those who *conquer*.
 3. We are called to be conquerors because we live in an evil age, an age in which powerful forces are arrayed against God's kingdom.
 4. Sin, Satan, the world, death — these are the sworn enemies of God.
 5. The only way we can enter God's kingdom is if we overcome these enemies.
 6. Revelation 5 tells us that, while we would never be able to overcome these enemies in our own strength, the Lamb has overcome them all.

7. And when we trust in Christ for our salvation, we are more than conquerors in him.
- D. Jesus is worthy to open the scroll because by his death and resurrection he has accomplished God's great plan of redemption.
1. The cross and the empty tomb stand at the center of history.
 2. As Jesus told his disciples before he ascended back into heaven, because of his death and resurrection, he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.
 3. And as he prayed to the Father in his great high-priestly prayer in John 17, "you have given [the Son] authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him." (v. 2)
 4. Jesus has all the power needed to ensure that the saving work that he has accomplished is applied to the lives of everyone whom he died to save.
 5. In Revelation 5, this is symbolized by the fact that the Lamb has seven horns.
 6. Horns are often used in Scripture as symbols of great power.
 7. The fact that the Lamb has seven of them conveys that his power is perfect and complete.
 8. Nothing in the universe will be able to prevent him from bringing each one of his elect into his kingdom and ensuring that they are kept in it.
- E. The Lamb also possesses all the wisdom and insight that he needs to execute God's plan.

1. This is symbolized by the fact that he has “seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”
 2. The mention of “seven spirits of God” does not mean that there are seven Holy Spirits.
 3. As we have already noted, the number seven is symbolic of perfection and fullness in Revelation.
 4. We see another mention of the seven spirits of God in chapter 4, where they are symbolized by the seven torches of fire before God’s throne.
 5. Those seven flaming torches correspond to the seven lampstands in Revelation 1 through 3, which represent the fullness of Christ’s church throughout the earth.
 6. The seven torches are symbolic of the fact that the Holy Spirit is the source of light and life for the church universal.
- F. In Revelation 5, the Lamb’s possession of the seven spirits of God symbolizes that his accomplishment of his mediatorial work has resulted in his receiving the fullness of the Spirit without measure.
1. The apostle Paul makes the same point when he says in 1 Corinthians 15 that the risen Christ “became a life-giving spirit.” (v. 45)
 2. At his resurrection, the God-man came into full possession of the Spirit of God.
 3. And now he sends the Spirit to apply his saving work in the lives of his people.
 4. The Lamb’s seven eyes are symbolic of the Spirit’s perfect wisdom as he goes throughout the world to bring the elect to saving faith.

5. This was first manifested on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church to empower it for its ministry.
6. As Peter explained in his Pentecost sermon, the resurrected and exalted Jesus, "having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit... has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." (Acts 2:33)
7. It is by that same Spirit of Pentecost that Jesus continues to advance the interests of his kingdom all throughout the earth.
8. By the Spirit's power, the gospel ministry is being made effective for the gathering and perfecting of the saints.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Though we are living in a secular age, secularism is already being exposed as an enterprise that is devoid of hope.
- B. More and more people are seeing the extent of the corruption in the government, in the media, and in the rest of our society's elite institutions.
- C. This is opening up opportunities for the gospel.
- D. The resulting cynicism is causing people to look for hope.
- E. As always, the conquering Lamb is in full control.
- F. He is searching all the corners of the earth with perfect sight, and he is executing his saving work with perfect power.
- G. That being the case, let us offer our lives and our resources up to him, that we might be the instruments of his power as he continues to advance his glorious kingdom in this present evil age.