

## **The Way of Christ's Kingdom**

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Revelation: Looking at Life From the Perspective of Heaven Series

Revelation 5

We live in a wonderful time in history. It is one of those rare times of massive transformation. We live in a period of monumental shifts; there is a seismic shift taking place across the face of the earth. Governments can no longer control people within any borders through propaganda and lies because information and the truth permeate every border. People have wireless connections and ways of discovering what the facts are. Businesses can no longer control markets. Competition can come from anywhere. Information can come from anywhere.

But there is a transition, a transformation, which is often overlooked. The transformation that goes beyond new information technologies, or global competition. Philip Jenkins, the author of a wonderful book titled, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, said that most historians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have missed one of the century's biggest story. The century's biggest story was not the story of World Wars. We've had them before; we'll probably have them again. The biggest story of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not the rise and fall of communism, or the rise and fall of fascism. According to Prof. Philip Jenkins, who is a Penn State University historian, the century's biggest story was the shift of Christianity from being centered in Europe and North America to being centered in South America and Africa and the Pacific Rim. In other words,

global Christianity underwent a seismic shift of enormous proportions after centuries of being a Northern and Western religion. Christianity is now chiefly a Southern and Eastern religion.

You want to know how big the story of Christianity's shift was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? In the year 1900 the whole continent of Africa had at most 10 million Christians. In the year 2000 Africa contained 400 million Christians, a 40-fold increase. Do you think that even one newspaper or magazine mentioned this story as the millennium changed? We read all those stories a few years ago about the changing century, how many of you read stories about the global shift of Christianity?

Do you know that more Anglicans attend church in Nigeria each Sunday than in England, Scotland, Wales, Canada, and all the Episcopalians in the US combined? There were more Catholics baptized last year in the Philippines than in Italy, France, Spain and Austria combined.

In this time of change, we are seeing a multiplication of the ways that Christians are interacting with their world. Some Christians are choosing the way of violence. In many parts of Africa, in the Congo for example, in Indonesia, in Lebanon, many Christians believe that the way to victory in this world is the way of the Crusades. This has been the historic approach of Christians towards Muslims for the last 1000 years, the way of violence, the way of the Crusades.

Other Christians reject the way of violence, but they believe that the way of Christ's Kingdom is by grabbing the levers of political power. As one pastor recently put it, "We Christians are the largest special interest group in America. The majority needs to stop being pushed around by the minority." There is this growing connection between Christianity and the Republican Party. Some people believe that the way of the Kingdom is through an alliance with the Republican Party.

Some Christians take a very different view. They despair of any change coming about through politics. In fact, some Christians despair of this country being turned around at all. These Christians advocate withdrawal from society. There are a number of books being written right now, which suggest that the only hope for Christianity in America or in Europe is through the establishment of 21<sup>st</sup> century style monasteries. We've got to preserve a little bit of holiness, a little bit of Christian community behind monastery walls.

Now, most Christians are not that radical and yet, we see the advocates of withdrawal everywhere. Pull your kids out of public school. Move out into the country. Buy every house in the neighborhood and populate every single house in your neighborhood with Christians.

It is interesting that the options for God's people haven't changed all that much in the 2000 years since Jesus walked on the earth. In Jesus' day, the Jews in Palestine were basically divided between those who advocated violence against Roman rulers. In Jesus' day these folks were called zealots. They were the terrorists. They were the Christian militia. They were the crusaders of their day.

There were other Jews in Jesus' day who tried to grab the levers of political power. They advocated collaboration and working with the Roman government. These folks were called Sadducees. They would be the rough equivalent of the Religious Right today.

Some Jews said that first century Jewish society was hopeless. The only chance for salvation was to move out into the desert around the Dead Sea area, to withdraw and pray, and pursue holiness apart from the world. These folks were called Essenes. They produced the scrolls that today are called The Dead Sea Scrolls.

Well, Jesus proposed a fourth option – not violent revolution, not collaboration and compromise with the government, not withdrawal and hiding from the world. But Jesus' way of triumph and victory and influence involved the cross. Jesus' way of victory involved the shedding of his own blood. Jesus' way of influence involved obedience to the Father's will, taking the role of a servant, and patiently bearing witness.

There is almost no more important question in contemporary society than this perennial question: How are we Christians supposed to interact with the larger society? How do we Christians exercise influence and power? That is the subject of Revelation 5 and, indeed, one of the main subjects of the book of Revelation. I've called today's talk, "The Way of Christ's Kingdom." Let's pray.

Revelation 5 – Let's remember the context that John is writing in. He is writing to a group of churches that are dealing with Roman power in some way or other. Some of the churches were very prosperous and getting along quite fine. Other churches were being persecuted. Some people were being martyred. Every church was experiencing some kind of mess. The mess could have been external pressure through government or societal oppression. The mess could have been internal through false teaching, sexual immorality, divisions, and heresies.

John, in a vision, is taken up to heaven. The book of Revelation is all about Heaven's perspective on life in this world. Before we talk about all the problems we have, before John analyzes all the problems in the church or the problems with the Roman Empire, he orients his readers. That is what the book of Revelation does. It orients us. It centers us. Revelation lifts us out of ourselves, out of our own world, out of our own political situation, out of our own family problems so we can see things the way God sees things.

What do we discover when we are taken up to heaven? We discover in Rev. 4 that we live in a God-centered universe and that the universe doesn't revolve around us or our needs. We discovered in Rev. 4 that we live in a God-centered universe. We discovered in Rev. 4 that we live in a God-ruled universe. And we discovered in Rev. 4 that life's highest purpose is to be in relationship with God and to worship him and enjoy him forever.

Now, Rev. 5 continues to build on this. John is not only given a vision of God in heaven. John is given a vision of Jesus Christ and he is also given a vision of a mysterious scroll. Christ and this scroll form the two central focuses, the two foci, of this text. Rev. 5:1-4

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Rev 5:1 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.

Rev 5:2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"

Rev 5:3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.

Rev 5:4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

Let's begin with the scroll. In v. 1 we read about a scroll that is filled with writing on the front and back. Perhaps the indication is that there is no room for anything else to be added. The scroll was full. This scroll is taken from God's right hand, which some of you know is a metaphor in ancient Judaism that signifies God's power and his authority. The scroll is taken from the right hand of

God. We read that the scroll is sealed with seven seals. In other words, whatever is in this scroll is secret; it is inaccessible.

There is a hugely important message in the scroll that John desperately wants to discover, but the message remains hidden. It remains mysterious.

So the mighty Angel asks this question in v. 2,

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Rev 5:2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”

And he receives this answer in v. 3,

**SLIDE**

Rev 5:3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.

There is a search throughout the universe for someone to open the seals and disclose the message, but no one can be found. The issue, of course, is not that the Angel can't find anyone strong enough to break the seals. The issue is that there is no one worthy enough to open the seals. All the best achievements of men and women, whether we are talking about prophets, apostles, priests, lay people, Popes, presidents, military heroes, martyrs, artists, writers, Nobel Prize winners, the best and the brightest, no man or woman on earth, no angel in Heaven, not Gabriel, who announced the birth of Christ, or Michael, the

Archangel who is the defender of God's people, no one in heaven or on earth is worthy to open the scroll.

What is in the scroll? What is the content of the scroll that is sealed?

Now, this is a much disputed matter. Commentators offer a lot of different opinions. Some say the scroll is simply a statement of the great end time judgments that are narrated in Rev. 6 and following. So when the seal is broken in Rev. 6, we'll get to that next week, some people say we are beginning to read the content of the scroll. But as I'm going to say next week, I believe that judgments accompany the opening of the scroll, but they aren't the content of the scroll. The opening of the seals prepares us for what the scroll will say, but these judgments are not what the scroll is saying.

Some scholars say that the scroll is a book of destiny concerning the history of the world. But I think that is too broad. Rev. doesn't lay out the history of the whole world. Nor is the scroll the Old Testament scriptures as some people suggest that can only be read through the lens of Christ.

John is desperate. He wants to find out what is in this scroll. And so he weeps. His tears represent the tears of every suffering person throughout all of time who has cried before God. John's tears stand for the tears of God's people and they mingle with our own tears. When we cry: Lord, you've taught us to pray your



kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, dear God, when will your kingdom come? When will your will be done?

John's tears mingle with the tears of women in Africa who are dying of AIDS and who are afraid to die because they will leave their children orphaned and alone. John's tears are mingled with the tears of girls age 6 and 7 in Africa who are being used as sexual partners in the insane belief that sex with a child can heal someone of AIDS. His tears are mingled with the tears of young boys in the Congo and Northern Uganda who are forced to carry machine guns and kill other young boys. In Africa right now 25 million people are infected with AIDS. 2.5 million people died of AIDS last year just in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Lord, when will your kingdom come?

In Iraq, how many men must die from suicide bombers and car bomb attacks?

Lord, we cry, when will your kingdom come to the inner city of Columbus? How many more young men have to grow up visiting their fathers, uncles, and older brothers in prison once a month? How many more drug addicts, dropouts, and gang-bangers do we have to produce as a society?

John weeps. He wants to know the content of the scroll as he prays: When will your kingdom come? And we pray that. When will your kingdom come Lord, to

our own children who are not following you? Lord when will your kingdom come to our marriages? How long must some of us live without love, without friendship, without emotional connection or attention? Lord, I keep praying and praying for healing. I'm sick. My loved one is sick. I keep praying for salvation. I keep praying for a reconciled relationship. When will you answer the prayer that you directed us to pray: Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven?

And Lord, how will your kingdom come? In John's day, God's people wanted to know how will the oppressor, the persecutor, namely the Roman Government, who John later in the book of Revelation calls "the beast," be defeated? How will the nations be converted? Lord, John prays, how will the people in this huge empire be brought to you? How will people be brought to faith?

We ask the same questions today. How will the beast, which is slaughtering our brothers and sisters in Viet Nam, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Sudan, how will the beast be overthrown? How will the beast that is the abortion industry, how will the beast that is the pornography industry, how will the beast that is the drug trade be overthrown in America?

And Lord, how will the nations be converted? How will Uzbekistan come under your reign, dear God? How will you save the Muslims in Indonesia, the communists in China, and the billion Hindus in India, and the hedonists at OSU,

and people at work in our government and in offices and Central Ohio businesses, in our schools, in our neighborhoods, and in our families – how will all these folks be saved?

This, brothers and sisters, is the content of the scroll. The scroll answers the question: When will God's Kingdom come? And even more the scroll answers the question: How will Christ's Kingdom come? What is the way of Christ's Kingdom?

What we learn from the scroll, as it is revealed through the rest of the book of Revelation, is that God's Kingdom comes as God's people walk faithfully in the steps of God's Messiah, suffering as he suffered, bearing witness, as he bore witness, serving, as he served, obeying as he obeyed, praying as he prayed. The way of the kingdom is the way of imitating our Leader Jesus Christ.

Let's consider the question of the scroll's content in this way. Who was it that was qualified to open the scroll? V. 5,

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:5 Then 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."

In v. 5 we read that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. Now, when we read these words by themselves, we might say: Well, we are following the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, we are following the Root of King

David, and perhaps the way of the kingdom is violence, the way of military conquests, the way of grabbing believers in political power. Perhaps the way of the Kingdom is through special interest politics. This is the way of victory.

When it calls Jesus the Lion of the tribe of Judah, those of you who know your Old Testament know that the Jewish Messiah was supposed to come from the tribe of Judah, which was one of the 12 Tribes of Israel. We read this prophecy of Messiah in Gen. 49:8-10

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Ge 49:8 “Judah, your brothers will praise you;  
your hand will be on the neck of your enemies;  
your father’s sons will bow down to you.

Ge 49:9 You are a lion’s cub, O Judah;  
you return from the prey, my son.

Like a lion he crouches and lies down,  
like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?

Ge 49:10 The scepter will not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
until he comes to whom it belongs  
and the obedience of the nations is his.

But not only was Messiah supposed to come from Judah and be, as it were, the Lion of Judah, but Messiah was supposed to be a descendant of the Old Testament King David. King David, as you may know, was the greatest military hero in the Old Testament. He defeated the Philistines. He defeated the Moabites. He defeated all the enemies of the Jews. It was under King David and his son, King Solomon, that the borders of Israel reached their greatest extent. Israel encompassed some of present day Egypt, all of the modern day

nation of Israel, including the West Bank, most of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and portions of Iraq. If all you had was these two images, the Lion of Judah and the Root of David, you might think that the way of Jesus the Messiah was the way of military or political conquest.

That is certainly what the Roman Emperor Constantine thought. Constantine fought a great civil war against his chief political rival. And in 311 AD, he thought he saw a cross in the sky and he believed he heard Jesus say the words: By this cross, conquer. So he had his troops paint crosses on their shields and they won an enormously important military victory by the Milvian Bridge that ended up uniting the Roman Empire and resulted in Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire.

This is what the crusaders thought. They thought that following Christ and overthrowing the beast meant marching into military battle under Christ's leadership, stomping on your enemies. Many people throughout history have thought that the way of the Kingdom was the way of violence.

You ask: How crazy is that?

Is it so hard for us to connect with a desire to stomp on our enemies? If you have a competitor in business, don't just take market share from them, beat them into the ground. Force them into bankruptcy. Close down their business.

If you are fighting in a divorce proceeding, you might hear from your attorney:  
Don't just go for an equitable settlement, go for the jugular. Sue for total custody of the kids, even if your husband is a good father, even if your wife is a decent mother. Sue for total custody. Go for the jugular. Bury your ex-spouse in a blizzard of filings and paperwork. Keep dragging them back to court until you totally exhaust all of their resources in legal fees. Do any of you connect with any of this?

Don't just stand up for yourself. Don't just win an argument. Reduce your wife to tears. Shred her self-esteem. Attack your wife personally. Call her fat. Call her stupid. Let her believe she is worthless and unattractive.

Wives, carve up your husband into little pieces with your razor sharp tongue. Attack his manhood. Call him lazy. Call him a rotten provider. Criticize his love-making. Hit him where it really hurts.

We shred people in our own families – our sisters, our brothers, our parents, our children.

Looking at the lives of many Christians, you would have to say that we must believe that this is the way of the kingdom. Someone has to put them in their place, and you are just the person to do it.

In sports, act like one college basketball coach, who told his players this last season to submarine their opponents. As one of the opponents went up for a lay-up, one guy cut their legs out from under them. Put them out of the game. Break their arms.

Take no prisoners at work or in politics. If a homosexual shouts, you Christians shout louder. Shout them down. If they have a knife, you get a gun. If they have a gun, you get a tank.

Let me ask you a question: Is there anyone with whom you just have kept raising the ante? I will see you and raise you a hundred? I won't dial this controversy down. I won't try to move towards reconciliation, towards peace. I am going to beat you into the ground.

Now there is victory and triumph in Christ's kingdom, but it is not the triumph or victory of this world. It is not the triumph of violence; the triumph of superior force; the triumph of better political organization, shredding other human beings, or shouting down your enemies. Christ triumphed. We read in v. 5,

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:5 Then 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."

I would like you to circle that word “triumphed” in your Bible. The word “triumph” is a form of the Greek word “*nike*,” which is victory, or in its verb form, it means to overcome. *Nike* is what the sneaker company is named for – Nike, victory, overcoming. It is a word that appears over and over in the book of Revelation. Since Christ has triumphed, his people share in his triumph, v. 10.

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Rev 5:10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

Now what does that mean for those of you who are followers of Christ? I want to speak for a moment to those of you who have turned to Christ for salvation.

What does it mean for you that your leader Jesus has triumphed? What does it mean for you that your leader Jesus has won a victory? What does it mean for you to reign not in the by and by, but now that you are a follower of Jesus to reign on this earth in this city, in your body, with your little relationships, and your circumstances? What does it mean for you to share in the triumph of Jesus and to reign?

Again, I don’t think we are talking about military victories or taking the way of the zealot. It may not mean political victories at the ballot box. It may not mean that your circumstances change.



One thing it certainly does mean is that you, beloved follower of Jesus, never need to be defeated by anything or determined by anything, or defined by anything other than your Lord, the Victor, Jesus Christ. Yes, there were terrible things that happened to you as a child, for some of you, unspeakable things, wicked things. But through Christ's triumph you could say: I will not be defeated by it, I will not be determined by, I will not be defined by the abuse I suffered as a child. I am not going to be an eternal victim.

You can say: I will not be defined by my parent's divorce.

I will not be determined by the poverty I grew up in. I will not be defeated by all the nay sayers who communicate that I must fail.

Brothers and sisters, this is New Testament Christianity. The theme song for the New Testament Christian is the African-American spiritual, "We Shall Overcome." Is that the theme song of your life? We shall overcome? As a church, we shall overcome? As an individual, I shall overcome? Is that the theme song of your life? Maybe you have cancer, but Christ has triumphed. V. 5,

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:5 Then 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."

And if you are in relationship to Christ, you can triumph as well. The Lion of Judah can deliver you from cancer by healing you, or he can deliver you through cancer by giving you gifts of faith and perseverance. Whether you are delivered from cancer, or you are delivered through it, you can always say: I will not be defeated. I will not be determined. I will not be defined by my cancer.

Think, brothers and sisters, with me of the things that regularly defeat us and define us and determine whether we are going to have joy or peace. Do you ever exercise faith in your victorious King? Do you ever stop and say: No, I'm not simply going to be another statistic, another failure, another victim of powers too strong for me. Through Christ I will overcome. You can overcome and not be defined by your difficult marriage. You can overcome and not be determined by your difficult circumstances. You can overcome and not be defeated by your past mistakes.

This triumph, this victory that we have in Christ, is something that we don't hoard up for ourselves. This victory, this triumph, is something that we invite others into. That is why we are building the community center. We are not trying to defeat the city. We are trying to rescue the city from its defeat. The way of the Kingdom is the way of invitation. The way of the kingdom is the way of welcome. The way of the kingdom is the way of imploring people to come out from broken lives, come out from failed relationships, come out from places of abuse and

shame and hiding. Come, share the triumph of Jesus Christ, who is the Lion of Judah, the Root of King David.

How did Christ conquer? I want you to notice something in Rev. 5. There is an amazing paradoxical statement. John hears the words in v. 5,

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Rev 5:5 Then 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."

But when he looks he doesn't see a lion gorging itself on its prey. What does he see? He sees the Lamb, v. 6

**SLIDE**

Rev 5:6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Here we have the central mystery of the Christian faith – the glorious Messiah, the Davidic King, who proceeded King David, the Lion of Judah, came into this world as a Lamb.

This gives us insight into the way of the Kingdom. The way of the Kingdom is triumph, but not as a lion triumphs. The Lion of Judah triumphed by being a Slain Lamb.

Now the Lamb is the central image of the Bible. It speaks to us about sacrifice and shed blood. No Jew could read the words of v. 6,

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

and not immediately think of the Passover Lamb in the OT book of Exodus. In the book of Exodus every Jewish family had to kill their own lamb and then take the blood of the lamb and put it on the lintel and door posts of their homes. It was only the blood of a slain lamb that preserved the Jewish families from the Angel of Death that killed all the first born sons in Egypt. Only the blood of the lamb caused the Angel of Death to pass over a house.

The Lamb. That is what Jesus the Messiah is called by John the Baptist in John 1:29,

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Jn 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The Lamb. Many of you know that the exact moment of Jesus' death was the moment when the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the temple. Here is the Passover. John is clearly telling us that the Lamb of God is the Passover Lamb by having his shed blood applied to our lives, judgment passes over us just like

the Angel of Death passed over the houses of the Israelites back in the book of Exodus.

It is by being slain that the Lamb conquers. We read in Rev. 5:9-10 these words:

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:9 And they sang a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased men for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Rev 5:10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth.”

This is a repeated theme, by the way, in the New Testament. It is by crucifixion, by being nailed to a cross, that the Lion of Judah defeated every power – death, the demonic, sin, the world. It was by being crucified that the Lion of Judah conquered. It was by being a lamb that the lion conquered. Listen to v. 9 again. It says:

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:9 And they sang a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased men for God

It says: Because you were slain and with your blood you purchased me for God.  
By your blood you purchased men and women for God.

Throughout the Bible people are brought out of slavery by some costly payment. People are bought out of slavery by the price of an animal sacrifice, or the price of money or someone's life. You know, sadly slavery is not something that passed away from the earth following the American Civil War. There has been a recent spate of articles about the worldwide sex slave trade. It is a horrible 21<sup>st</sup> century version of buying and selling human beings, many of them young boys and girls. Trading in human lives and bodies for the purpose of satisfying someone's, often an American man's, grotesque perverted lust.

Nicholas Kristof, the brilliant New York Times writer, talks about meeting a Cambodian teenage girl named Srey Neth. I want you to listen to the story of one young woman, who represents what it conservatively estimated to be about 700,000 young women around the world. Nicholas Kristof wrote this in the New York Times a year ago in January. He said:

"I met Srey Neth, a lovely, giggly, wisp of a teenager, here in the wild smuggling area of Northwestern Cambodia. Girls here are bought and sold, but there is an important difference compared with the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Many of these modern slaves will be dead of AIDS by their 20's.

Some 700,000 people are trafficked around the world each year, many of them just girls. They form part of what I believe will be the paramount memorial challenge we will face in this century: to address the brutality that is the lot of so many women in the developing world. Yet it is an issue that gets little attention and that most American women's groups have done shamefully little to address. The only way to have access to girls in this area is to appear to be a customer. So I put out the word that I wanted to meet young girls and stayed at the seedy \$8 a night Phnom Pich guesthouse – a woman who is a pimp soon brought Srey Neth to my room. Srey Neth claimed to be 18 but looked several years younger. She insisted at first that she was free and not controlled by the guesthouse. But soon she told us her real story:

A female cousin had arranged her sale and taken her to the guesthouse. Now she was sharing a room with three other prostitutes, and they were all pimped to guests. 'I could walk around in this village, but only with a close relative of the owner,' she said. 'They keep me under close watch. They do not let me go out alone. They are afraid I will run away.'

'Why not try to escape at night,' I asked?

'They would get me back and something bad would happen. Maybe a beating. I heard that when a group of girls tried to escape, they locked them in the room and beat them up.'

'What about the police,' I asked? 'Couldn't you go to the police for help?'

'The police wouldn't help me because they get bribes from the brothel owners,' Srey Neth said, adding that three police officials had come to the guesthouse for sex with her.

I asked Srey Neth how much it would cost to buy her freedom?

She named an amount equivalent to \$150.

'Do you really want to leave,' I asked? 'Are you sure you wouldn't come back to this?'

She had been watching TV and listlessly answering my questions. Now she turned abruptly and snorted: 'This is hell,' she said sharply, speaking with passion for the first time. 'You think I want to do this?'

That is when I made a firm decision I had been toying with for some time. I would try to buy the freedom for this girl and return her to her family - \$150 to purchase a teenage girl from hell."



The New Testament teaches that Christ purchased this world out from slavery not for \$150, but with his own precious blood. You see, the New Testament teaches that every human being born into this world is born a slave. We may not be slaves like Srey Neth, but we are slaves nevertheless. We are slaves to addiction, slaves to sin, slaves to death, slaves of Satan, slaves of public opinion, and slaves of current fashion, but Christ purchased us out from slavery. Like Nicholas Kristof, who purchased this young teenage girl, Christ bought you and me out from slavery.

Our jail cells have been unlocked. When we choose by faith to walk out of our prison cells, we trust in Christ. We can assume our roles in this world not as conquerors dominating everyone else, smashing our enemies to the ground. We were purchased for priestly service. V. 10

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Brothers and sisters, the arrogant, triumphal attitude: We're going to conquer Ohio for Christ, sometimes Christians and Christian leaders sound to me like they're on spiritual steroids. We're going to take this government back for Christ. We are going to conquer the Muslim world. There is triumph. Again, there is an invitation, a welcome, an embrace of others into the triumph of Christ but our

main role in this world is summed up in this word “priest.” Followers of Jesus Christ are priests.

The Christian priesthood is not confined to pastors or those who have been through seminary, or those who serve communion to us. Every Christian is called a priest. We read the same thing in Rev. 1:6,

#### SLIDE

Rev 1:6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

A priest is an intermediary. A priest is someone who stands between people and God representing God to people and representing people to God. Here is the way of Christ’s kingdom. You Christian follower, you take the role of a priest.

As a priest you represent God to people. What people know of God, what people believe about God, what people learn of God, they learn through his followers, who are priests. We bear witness to God. A priest says: Look at us and you will learn something about the God we serve.

Now what do people in Central Ohio learn of our God as they look at our lives? Maybe as someone goes to our food pantry, they say: I never realized what a great giver God must be. I watch God’s people and they have such an attitude of giving. God must be incredibly generous.

Perhaps people will say: I never understood, but God must have come into the world as a servant because I look at Vineyard's people at the Single Parents' Fair and oh my goodness, do they serve. They don't try to run out my life or dominate me. They come to serve me.

Maybe people would say: Looking at the recovery groups in the Vineyard, I recognize that God must welcome failures like me. God must love people who have made mistakes. God must be incredibly patient with folks like me who have blown up their lives because I watch the Vineyard and that is the way they are. They welcome failures. They invite folks in who have made mistakes.

You are a priest, if you are a follower of Christ. You represent God to people. You are a priest in your family. You are a priest in your workplace. You are God's priest in your classroom and with your friends and in your marriage.

Be honest, what kind of God do you think people have learned about and would believe in by watching you? What kind of God do you think people would believe in by listening to you? Would they say: God must be a bigot? God must be an excluder? God has no room for someone like me?

Priests bear witness to God. Priests pray. V. 8,

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:8 And 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 the saints.

Again, brothers and sisters, you are priests. Your fundamental role in this world is to be a priest. You not only represent God to people, but you represent people to God, which means priests pray. One of your major roles in this world is not to withdraw from the world, to defend yourself against the world, to defeat the world, but to pray for the world.

Be honest. Do you pray for our city? Do you pray for the Mayor? Do you pray for City Council members? Do you pray for our schools? We read in the newspapers about the difficulties going on in Mifflin High School. Do you simply critique the principal or the school board or do you pray? You are a priest. Pray for the girl who was attacked at Mifflin High School. Pray for the other students there and the teachers, and the principal. Pray for our school superintendent, Dr. Jean Harris. She is a sister in Christ.

Pray for couples in our church whose marriages are on the rocks. You are priests. Pray for single people in our church to be fruitful, to be effective, to be used by God. You are a priest. Do you pray for our church? You are a priest, do you pray for the church's leaders? You are a priest, do you pray for people at your workplace? Priests pray.

Finally, priests worship. The Lion of Judah, who is the Slain Lamb of God, is encountered in v. 6,

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

The Lamb was not just slain, but John sees him standing. This is almost certainly a reference to Christ's resurrection. Not only is the Lamb standing, but he is standing in the center of the throne, sharing power, authority, and deity with God the Father. The Lamb has seven horns, meaning he has all power. Horns are the symbol of power in the Bible. The Lamb has seven eyes, referring to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit proceeds not just from the Father, but from the Messianic Lamb of God.

This Slain Lamb is not just risen and given all power, but the Slain, Risen, Exalted, All-Powerful Lamb is worshipped first by himself, v. 11-12

#### SLIDE

Rev 5:11 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.

Rev 5:12 In a loud voice they sang:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!"

And then together with God the Father, vv. 13-14,

## SLIDE

Rev 5:13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:  
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!"  
Rev 5:14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

There may be no clearer statement in the entire New Testament of Christ's deity than these texts here in Rev. 5. Here is Jesus sharing in the worship and glory due only to God alone. Remember, this scene is being recorded by a Jewish Christian, someone steeped in Jewish monotheism, someone who had a fierce loyalty to the notion that worship is exclusively owed to Yahweh the Lord.

See, worship separates the creature and the Creator. To worship anything or anyone other than the Creator is gross idolatry. Later in Revelation when John falls before an angel in worship, the angel rejects his worship and directs him to worship God alone. Rev. 19:10,

## SLIDE

Rev 19:10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Jesus receives worship because he shares the being of the Creator. Again, remember that this worship of Jesus is not being recorded by a Gentile Christian context where you might expect a certain carelessness among Gentiles given

their history of worshiping many Gods. John is a Jewish Christian and he is revealing this incredible mystery to us that Jesus, the Lion of Judah, who is the Slain Lamb of God, is included in the eternal being of God. The praises due to God, we learn, are also due to Jesus Christ. The glory due to God, we learn, are also due to Jesus Christ. The honor, the power, all the attributes that we give to God, we also must give to Jesus Christ.

This is the greatest worship scene ever, the four living creatures representing the animal kingdom and the 24 elders representing the Old Testament and New Testament people of God, and the myriads of angelic beings and every bird in the air and fish in the sea, man, woman, and child on the earth worship and as priests, we get to lead out in that worship even today. We are priests. We represent God to people. That's the way of the kingdom. We are priests. We represent people to God in prayer and in worship.

When you see this fantastic worship scene, don't you say: I just want to be a part of that. I just want to be included in that. What a horror to have every angel and every person, animal and living thing worshiping God, worshiping the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb of God who was Slain, but who is now standing and who is in the center of the throne of God; what a horror to have every living creature worshiping God and Messiah and you are not a part of that. What a horror to discover that you have decided through choice after choice and decision after decision to not celebrate the triumph of Jesus the Messiah.

What a horror to discover too late that your life has been a lie; that you've lived a self-centered life as if you were in the center of the throne, that you've lived an unsubmitted life as if you reigned from the throne. What a horror to discover that you have been in rebellion and lived in rejection to the one who purchased you at the cost of his own blood. Can you think of anything worse than watching all of creation celebrating someone who is worthy and some thing that is marvelous, namely the person and work of Jesus Christ and you are on the outside.

The way of the kingdom is to come in, to join in this great priestly function, the worship of God and the Lamb. Let's pray.



## **The Way of Christ's Kingdom**

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Rich Nathan

May 14-15, 2005

Revelation: Looking at Life From the Perspective of Heaven Series

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