

23/6/13

Exhortation: Song of the redeemed

Reading: Revelation 5

We meet together brethren and sisters around these emblems of our Heavenly Father's love, we meet not only to remember the Master's sacrifice, but importantly to bring to mind his great victory over sin and the consequences of that victory for us. For this is a victory that ensures that we are not the most miserable of men and women today, only having hope in Christ in this life!

No, rather our hope grows and is confirmed, ever the surer each day, through every passing week, month and year by the signs abounding all around us of our Lord's imminent return. That growing faith is equally supplemented by the providential care of our Heavenly Father both in our own lives and that of our brethren and sisters. These two precious strands of evidence, which emboldens our faith, calls upon and implores us personally to exhort "*one another: and so much the more, as we see the day approaching*".

Today our brother John, our "*companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*", brings before us a vision. That vision of the victory of our faith in overcoming the world through Christ Jesus in that glorious new song.

Revelation chapter 5 and verses 8 – 10

"The four living ones and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth".

Our Heavenly Father is presenting each of us here with the surety of our victory through the faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ, if we remain steadfast unto the end.

Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith (or faithfulness) of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me".

The faithfulness and the love of the Master motivated the Apostle to live for Christ, to imitate his example and to preach the truth. Is this what motivates us brethren and sisters? Do we have this same appreciation of the Master's love and involvement in our daily lives? Do we have the same desire to lovingly respond as the Apostle did and so live for the Master, that Christ be formed in us?

Now chapter five of Revelation takes us symbolically in time from the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father, all the way to the end of the Millennium. When the earth will be truly full of the glory of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea.

For in verse one, we have the scroll, which contains the outworking of the purpose of God all the way from John's day in the first century. Down through the ages, into our own day, as we here await the second coming of our Lord and right through to the end of the 1,000-year Millennial period, as symbolised in verse thirteen.

Verse 13

“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever”.

The scope of this chapter is breathtaking brethren and sisters, as the vision ends at the end of the millennium before even the first seal is unloosed in chapter six. Our Heavenly Father is showing to us the end from the beginning, proving to us that we can trust this more sure word of prophecy. Let us therefore take heed, unto it as a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the daystar arise in your hearts. For our Heavenly Father *“calleteth those things which be not as though they were”*.

These kingdom visions in Revelation, as indeed all passages about the kingdom are given unto us brethren and sisters to sustain us in hope. They are designed by our God to draw our minds upward and forward in time. They are given too us to meditate upon and contemplate the joy and the glory held out for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We recall how our Lord was himself sustained by the joy that was set before him, which enabled him to endure the stake and despise the shame.

So that now, he being victorious is set down at the right hand of the throne of God, as verse seven of Revelation five makes clear. Working now to bring to fulfilment the next phrase of the purpose of Almighty God, even the physical establishment of the kingdom of God in the earth.

Revelation chapter 3 and verse 21

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne”.

That promise of chapter three, brethren and sisters is seen here in chapter five and verse ten, as a reality, *“and hast made us unto our God kings and priests and we shall reign on the earth”*. Is this vision something, which will elate, uplift and sustain each one of us through the trials of the coming week, as the Old Testament prophecies did for our Lord? For this is the joy that is set before us, but will this picture of joy and glory so permeate our lives that we will endure our own stake and despise whatever shame we must each face?

2nd Timothy chapter 2 and verses 11 – 13

“It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself”.

As those words from Revelation five are read and as we read them privately, do we connect with the vision? Does this and other similar visions impact our thinking and our lives, as they should? Yes these, visions, brethren and sisters depict in symbol the surety of our hope, the joy and the glory to come in that great day. Yet the visions are also are designed to create within each one of us a longing for something much greater than the here and now.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3 and verse 11

*“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the **world** (Hebrew Olam – word for the kingdom) in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end”.*

Is there within each of us a longing for our Heavenly Father to sweep all that is around us out of the way and to establish the kingdom, because that is what is best for our world and the men and women upon it (*Holy discontentment*). Is there a desire to be there in that day, worshipping our God, with and before our Master in the great congregation?

Worshipping giving glory, and honour and thanks for the fulfilment of his promises and the vindication of his righteousness?

Indeed is there within each one of us brethren and sisters a sense of growing anticipation of being part of this mighty throng. Surrounding the throne in the temple of the age to come? Experiencing the incredible high, the unrestrained joy and overwhelming thankfulness that is evident in this section of scripture?

Revelation chapter 5 and verses 11 – 12

“And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living ones and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing”.

Humour me brethren and sisters for a moment, close your eyes and do your best to imagine the scene depicted here as I read these words again for you. *And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne*, so firstly we hear the angelic choir. Those ministering spirits that sang together at the creation and again at the birth of our Lord.

Then the scene pans out *and the living ones and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*. Now it includes the whole company of the redeemed saints, now with their voices joining the angelic choir. Can you see brethren and sisters you know and have known in the throng? Can you see yourself brother, sister in this great crowd of jubilant witnesses?

Can you feel the energy? Can you hear the singing, as they sing these glorious words recorded here? *Singing with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing”*. (Please, open your eyes if they are still closed).

What a sight this must have been, as the Apostle here try’s to convey to us the size, scale and emotion of this incredible congregation and event. Now although this vision is one of sign and symbol brethren and sisters. I am convinced that, the various worship scenes within the kingdom visions in Revelation contain valuable insight to the worship of the saints in the glorious age to come.

I think what we have here is the description of a real event. Interestingly, embrace this fact that none of the songs referenced in the Apocalypse are solos! We are witnessing a united community who with one mind and one mouth glorifies our God.

Psalm 22 and verses 22 – 23 & 25

“I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. Ye that fear Yahweh, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him”.

All of them singing with one voice, as the Greek shows here totally united completely in harmony and in unison. Singing no doubt with a loud voice out of heartfelt joy and gratitude. They repeatedly extol the character of the Lord Jesus Christ as Yahweh manifested in the earth.

Once more the worthiness of the one we have come to remember is pointed out and declared. Because of his victory over the flesh, he is worthy to “receive” these seven ascriptions of praise given to him. The Greek word “receive” denotes something, which is his right, in that He has earned it. Seven the number of completeness in relation to the covenants of promise. Signifying that our Master is indeed worthy of this complete praise. We have come once more to acknowledge in bread and wine brethren and sisters this truth.

Now these seven blessings given to the Master are a complete unit, because as is clear in the Greek they are governed by one article, so it reads: “*The power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing*”. Note also the cumulative effect of that little word “and” emphasising each individual aspect of this blessing, rising up in like steps from power to form a crescendo at the word “*blessing*”.

Now the first four of these blessings are possessions as a direct result of our Lord’s faithfulness to our Heavenly Father and the last three come as the result of everyone else acknowledging his worthiness.

We are reminded of Philippians chapter 2 and verses 9 – 11

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.

The great crescendo of praise that began in verse nine with continues to build up to a fitting climax. Prefiguring at first the subduing of the nations and the establishment of peace in the kingdom, but extending finally to the end of the Master's millennial rule, when God shall be all and in all.

Psalm 72 and verse 17 records

“His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed”.

These verses brethren and sisters in Revelation chapter five present us with a high view of the Lord Jesus Christ whom we shall shortly remember in the bread and wine before us upon the table. As a brother recently remarked to me in conversation, *“Wayne. As you get older your appreciation of the victory and the prevailing of the Master over sin. Grows in the light of the realisation of your own many failures and constant weaknesses, his victory becomes all the more majestic and astounding”.*

The universality of the redemptive work of our Heavenly Father through the Lord Jesus Christ requires a universal response of praise. A response, which began with the saints in verses nine and ten, extends to the angels in verses eleven and twelve. Now flows out in an ever widening circle as ripples on a pond to the whole of creation in verse thirteen.

Verses 13 – 14

“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four living ones said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever”.

This is the praise brethren and sisters, which is hinted at in:

Romans chapter eight and verses 19 – 22

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now”.

Brethren and sisters whatever you think of the symbolic language of this fifth chapter; understand this that the praise and the jubilation witnessed too in these elated verses will be very real and very personal to those blessed to be involved in that day.

So the whole creation repeatedly sings or chants this fourfold ascription of praise to God through his ruling Son the Lord Jesus Christ. *“Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever”*.

Now here in verse thirteen these four ascription’s of praise are not governed by just one article (*one the*), like those in verse twelve. But here each of them has its own article (*the*) for added emphasis. So the Greek reads *“The blessing and the honour and the glory and the power”*. Again we have that step like effect through the repeated use of the word *“and”* giving a cumulative and crescendo effect to the praise rendered.

Then in the final verse of the vision, fourteen we have the saints prostrating themselves, just as they did at the end of chapter four in devotion and humility before the throne. They bring a fitting conclusion to this tremendous crescendo of praise from verse nine to fourteen with the use of the transliterated Hebrew word *“Amen”*, **so be it, let this be so**. For here in symbol and prophetically is all their desire now fulfilled. We recall that this word *“Amen”* is actually one of the titles of our beloved Master (*used earlier in the book*), who is the fulfilment of our Heavenly Father’s entire purpose in the new creation.

Colossians chapter 1 and verses 17 - 20

“And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the ecclesia: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his stake, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven”.

Interestingly some Greek scholars say that the word *“said”* in this final fourteenth verse is iterative, meaning that the *“Amen”* sung would be done (*possibly antiphonally*) after each of the four ascription’s of praise in verse fourteen. So it ought to be *“The blessing Amen and the honour Amen and the glory Amen and the power Amen”*.

1st Corinthians chapter 15 and verses 24 & 28

“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all”.

This is exactly the point we reach in verse fourteen of Revelation five. For the instructions on the scroll, which shall now be loosed in chapter six and beyond. Teach us clearly the sovereignty of our Heavenly Father over history and the certainty of these things.

Therefore brethren and sisters we cry with those earlier brethren mentioned in chapter six who suffered for the truth, *“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”*

Now as we turn our attention to the emblems upon the table before us brethren and sisters. We consider the Master who indeed is worthy of our praise. For none of us are worthy, none of us were able (*have the virtue*) to perform that which our Lord has done. All of us are disqualified due to our own sinfulness and the nature that we bare.

Therefore our Heavenly Father *saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him”*. As Abraham stated to Isaac in Genesis twenty-two, *“my son, God will provide himself a lamb”* and indeed he has done so as Revelation five makes wonderfully clear.

So in the bread we are brought face to face with the word made flesh brethren and sisters. That word, which is powerfully able to impart unto us faith and to transform and renew our minds to be conformed to his image. Likewise in the wine we see the poured out blood of our Lord sacrificially given both for himself and for us in love. That example, which is able to motivate each of us to sacrifice and serve one another in love, after his example. That we might in our own individual way emulate him and walk worthy of God, who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory.

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