

“Worthy Is the Lamb”

May 1, 2022

Revelation Song series – Children’s Sunday

We’ve heard the words of John the Seer put to a tune that has become popular since it was released in 2009 called *Revelation Song*. Kari Jobe, who first released *Revelation Song*, says she thinks that it’s the Lord’s favorite song. It’s a foretaste of heaven. The writer, Jennie Lee Riddle, who wrote the words in 2004, says the song helps us to lift our eyes up to Jesus.

I love this song. For me, hearing these words from Revelation 5 put to music in and receiving this image of heavenly worship has been a comfort when I consider all those who have died and rest in God’s perfect peace. It’s a comfort and assurance as I consider a heavenly place even as we commit to God’s work now.

But even more, John the Seer reminds me that this is the ultimate vision of the Kingdom in its fullness - worship of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John’s vision goes from earth to heaven and back and forth throughout, but it’s in these “thin places” of worship that we find great hope and promise.

Last week, I shared a lot of information with you about Revelation, including that it was written to seven churches in what is modern-day Turkey.

SHOW SLIDE: Map of seven churches

Revelation isn’t so much a prediction, but this vision that really is meant to offer hope to people in John’s time - the end of the first century AD and into the early second century. It’s also meant to challenge them to remain faithful, and though we’re focusing on this amazing vision of worship, it’s important to know that John had specific words for these seven churches. See if anything sounds familiar.

In Ephesus, the people had lost the love that they had for Jesus at first, and it affected their fellowship with one another. People in Smyrna experienced persecution because they wouldn’t worship the emperor. In Pergamum, people compromised their faith by trying to fit into the culture around them so much so that there wasn’t any difference between them and anyone else. In Thyatira, they were trying to live as Christians when it was difficult to make a living if they didn’t participate in the culture around them.

People in Sardis were called nominal Christians - Christians in name only - and the challenge was for them to get over their apathy and get back to God. In Philadelphia, there were faithful people who would endure coming conflicts and

persecution. And finally, the people in Laodicea were accused of being lukewarm - thinking they could worship God and also worship the emperor, but they can't do both. Again, does anything sound familiar? For yourself? For the church?

Some of John's words still cut to the heart. No, they weren't written *to* us, but they are written *for* us. We struggle with ups and downs of faith - feeling those spiritual highs, but then falling away. We have competing loyalties between faith and culture - how we steward God's gifts, how we spend our time and money, whom we follow, and dare I say it, even struggling with idol worship - putting other things above our worship of God.

The messages that John sends to these seven churches that really strike me are John's calling out of nominal Christians - in name only - and the accusation of being lukewarm. Can people tell that we love Jesus and follow Jesus by how we act, even when we don't say it? How are we lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - lacking passion about the Good News - the Gospel that gives life, hope, joy, peace, and offers amazing grace?

The challenge is there, but John's vision of heaven that begins in chapter 4 and continues into chapter 5 requires us to use our imaginations. It's usually younger people who are better at imagination, so it's interesting that we're talking about this on Children's Sunday. We may not take much time to consider what heaven might be like. We may not speak of visions or dreams often, though they're very much a part of our faith story. Revelation invites us to let go of what we see around us and look to the vision of God's Kingdom that's here at moments and coming in its fullness.

One thing we can hear clearly from John is that worship of Jesus is vital to the Kingdom of God. It's the center of our faith. It's where we find strength to keep going. I hear that from people often - that worship is how they ground themselves in God's love. For the first ones to read this vision, worship was how they showed love for God and loyalty to God. No matter what's happening, Jesus is Lord and Savior. Jesus is on the throne. Jesus is the focus of our worship.

The focus is on the scroll that holds the decrees of God, but no one is worthy to open it except the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the Messiah. But when John looks for the Lion of Judah, he sees a Lamb with the marks of slaughter. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is worthy to open the scroll. Jesus showed power through sacrificial love and then was raised from death, showing God's victory over sin and death. That's why he is worthy. That's why we worship him. He alone is worthy of worship.

So those around the throne sing a new song, praising God, and then all of creation joins in. In chapter 1, John said that Jesus made us a Kingdom and priests, and we're called to worship and praise Jesus. For John the Seer, exiled on an island called Patmos, and for the people who received his letter, worship gave them hope in difficult times. Worship reminded them that Jesus was victorious even over the forces of evil and death that were present in the world. That's a powerful message for us, too.

And notice what the angels sing about the blessings they offer Christ glorified: **power** because of God's redeeming love, **wealth** because of the abundant grace in our lives, **wisdom** because of God's plan of salvation, **strength** because Jesus endured the pain and shame of the cross, **honor** because we've been redeemed, **glory** because we stand in awe of the gift of redemption and new life, and **praise** because of the joy in our hearts. There are seven offerings.

So maybe it's fitting that we read about this image of worship today as we celebrate ministry together - specifically those connections that we have with young people - teaching them and learning from them about faith, trust, and love. Worship is foundational. It's where we learn God's love for us. It's where we learn that Jesus - the Lamb of God - is worthy of our worship because he is Love "in the flesh." It's where we come to the table - and perhaps, just for a moment, the power of grace brings heaven and earth a little closer together.

May it be so today as we come to the table.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.