

Sermon

October 26, 2014

Title: Passover Lamb

Text: Revelation 4-7

Who is God?

Revelation Rollercoaster:

Ever feel like life was one big ride on a rollercoaster? You know the drill:

- Once everyone is seated, the car slowly climbs to the top of the coaster.
- At the top the car comes almost to a complete stop; you can see for miles in all directions.
- Then the car starts a long, breathtaking plunge, going faster and faster until it reaches the bottom of the loop.
- After the plunge, the car shoots up the other side of the loop, gradually slowing down until it reaches the next crest in the track.
- Sort of like this: [SHOW VIDEO CLIP](#) of wooden rollercoaster.

A lot of times it seems like life is a rollercoaster ride: with brief moments of clarity and peace interspersed with hair-raising plunges into chaos!

John's Revelation captures that reality by taking us on a breathtaking ride from the heights of Heaven down to the chaos of a world ruled by evil and back up again. He tells the story of God and His Creation in six different cycles of visions.

So, buckle your seatbelt: the ride is about to begin!

God, the Creator of all things:

The second vision cycle begins where the first one leaves off: Revelation 4 places us right in the middle of Heaven's Throne Room where God rules His Creation. John writes:

Revelation 4:1-2 NIV

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." ² At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

We stand with John at the top of the rollercoaster, as it were, in the control room of the Universe.

The picture John paints is one of all Creation giving honor to the Creator.

- Four “living creatures,” hybrids of heaven and earth, surround the Throne. They represent life here on Earth, and they endlessly proclaim that God alone is holy and supreme.
- The number “4” stands for the earth: in a few chapters we will encounter 4 horsemen who wreak havoc on the earth; 4 angels hold back the 4 winds; the human race is described with 4 terms – tribe, language, people and nation.
- Outside the four living creatures are 24 representatives of humanity – the 24 elders. They no doubt represent God’s People old and new as the 12 tribes and 12 apostles.
- The 24 elders also praise God, but do so by explaining *why* He is worthy of praise:

Revelation 4:11 NIV

*11 “You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”*

In this powerful vision John answers the greatest question of all: Who is God? His answer: the One who created all things. To Him there is no rival!

Who is God?

Who is God? You and I answer that question every day in the things we think, do and say. Our every action and every thought either joins with the four living creatures and 4 elders, or else gives allegiance to some false substitute. The biggest message of Revelation is the challenge to choose to worship and honor the One True God. Time and again, John will remind us of Who God is, and of what happens when we or our world go chasing after a counterfeit deity.

A Broken World

A world in need of repair:

We’ve paused for that fleeting instant at the top of the rollercoaster. Now, all too soon, we feel the car inching toward the brink....

John alerts us that all is not well with God’s Creation. He writes:

Revelation 5:1-4 NIV

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. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

The scroll sealed with seven seals contains God's divine decree to repair and restore His world. Richard Bauckham writes: "This contains the secret purpose of God for establishing his kingdom." (Bauckham, [The Theology of the Book of Revelation](#), loc 925 Kindle) But there's a problem: no one in all of Creation has the authority to break the seals and open the scroll. Creation cannot heal itself. Not even the best and brightest of our world can ever fix the deep evil and brokenness that has invaded God's Creation. All John can do is weep.

The Lion/Lamb:

But then, in the midst of his despair, John is alerted to the presence of the one Person who can and will repair God's Creation:

Revelation 5:5 NIV

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."

John *hears* of a Lion, but *sees* the Passover Lamb:

Revelation 5:6a NIV

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.

The Lion/Lamb is Jesus, God's Son. The Lion stood for God's King, but it was as a sacrificial Lamb that the victory over evil has been won. The Lamb alone is able to restore God's ruined world. As Creator in human form, He receives Creation's worship and praise.

The First Four Seals:

And then, all of a sudden, we find ourselves rushing down, down, down into the chaos of a ruined Creation. As chapter 6 opens, we see the Lamb opening the seals.

The seven seals are divided into a 4+3 pattern. The first 4 tell the story of the havoc wreaked on the earth by the 4 horsemen. Together they represent the things that humans do to each other in an evil and chaotic world:

- Military conquest (the white horse of the victor)
- Bloodshed (the red horse)

- Economic disruption (the black horse)
- Death – by sword, famine, plague and wild animals (the pale horse)

This is the world we live in. This is the world we know. This is the world that Jesus spoke of when He warned his disciples of “wars and rumors of wars.” It is world gone wrong, a world desperately in need of repair. By opening the seals, the Lamb unmask this world’s brokenness. We are plunging deeper and deeper into the chaos and darkness of the world.

Passover Lamb!

The Fifth Seal:

The opening of the 5th seal gives us a glimpse of God’s people who have “been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.” (Revelation 6:9) They are huddled under the altar before God as those who have sacrificed all for Him. And they ask the question that we all ask when things go wrong:

Revelation 6:10 NIV

10 They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”

How long, Lord? Have you been there? Are you there now? We all know the brokenness of this world – the injustice, the hardship, the suffering. We all long for God to come and make things right and new. So, in a sense, here *we are in the story*. We’ve plunged down the steep pitch into the dark valley of this world and we wonder –as do they – if we will ever come up.

The Sixth Seal: Judgment and the New Exodus People of God:

The answer comes quickly enough: the 6th seal brings a vision of the Final Judgment of the world. The world becomes unhinged: earthquake/solar eclipse/lunar eclipse/falling stars. The vision speaks to the unraveling of human kingdoms as the high and mighty run for cover. They have found themselves face to face with God’s Messiah:

Revelation 6:16-17 NIV

They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?”

A rebel world has come face to face with the world’s true Creator and Lord.

And where are God's People in this moment of judgment? As chapter 7 opens we learn that God has commanded that they be sealed:

Revelation 7:2-4 NIV

² Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ³ "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." ⁴ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

This depiction of the people of God hearkens back to the Exodus. We saw Jesus portrayed as the Passover Lamb in chapter 5. Now we see God's people envisioned as God's New Israel set apart and protected. The fact that they are numbered implies that they are God's army – called to defeat evil and injustice so that God's kingdom may come "on earth as it is in heaven." We meet them at the 6th seal, just before the end of the cycle:

James Resseguie points out that we meet God's Exodus people here at the 6th seal, suggesting an in-between space and time

"It is in-between time, the point of anticipation but not yet completion of the journey. It is...wilderness space...in between captivity in biblical Egypt and arrival at the promised land." (Resseguie, Revelation of John, loc. 1402 Kindle)

The sealing of God's People corresponds to Israel placing the blood of their Passover lambs on their doorposts on the night that the final plague struck Egypt. Now it is God's New Israel that has been sealed by the Lamb who opens the seals.

Passover Lamb:

There have been no end of theories and interpretations as to the identity of these 144,000 people who have been sealed by God. But John shows who they are in the final vision of this cycle:

Revelation 7:9 NIV

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Remember how John heard a voice announcing the coming of the Lion, but turned and saw a Lamb? The mighty King of Israel was one and the same with the crucified and risen Messiah Jesus. The same sort of thing happens here: first John *hears* of the sealing of Israel,

but he *sees* a vast multitude made up of people from the entire human family, the New People of God.

They – we included – are God’s New Exodus People. They have emerged from the suffering and chaos of this fallen world and are now standing tall in the presence of God and the Lamb. Jesus Himself has set them free and made them whole. An elder identifies them for John:

Revelation 7:14b NIV

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

And now, thanks to our Passover Lamb, we find ourselves experiencing victory in Heaven:

Revelation 7:15-17 NIV

¹⁵ *Therefore,*

*“they are before the throne of God
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne
will shelter them with his presence.*

¹⁶ *‘Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.*

*The sun will not beat down on them,
nor any scorching heat.*

¹⁷ *For the Lamb at the center of the throne
will be their shepherd;*

‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’

‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

The journey is complete: the Passover Lamb has taken us on the journey that He took for us. It is a journey that began in Heaven, descended into the darkest evil of this world, broke the power of sin and death once and for all, and opened the way for us to come home to God’s Promised Land. We are in one sense right where the story began, but we’re not the same. We’re whole, we’re home. All because of our Passover Lamb.

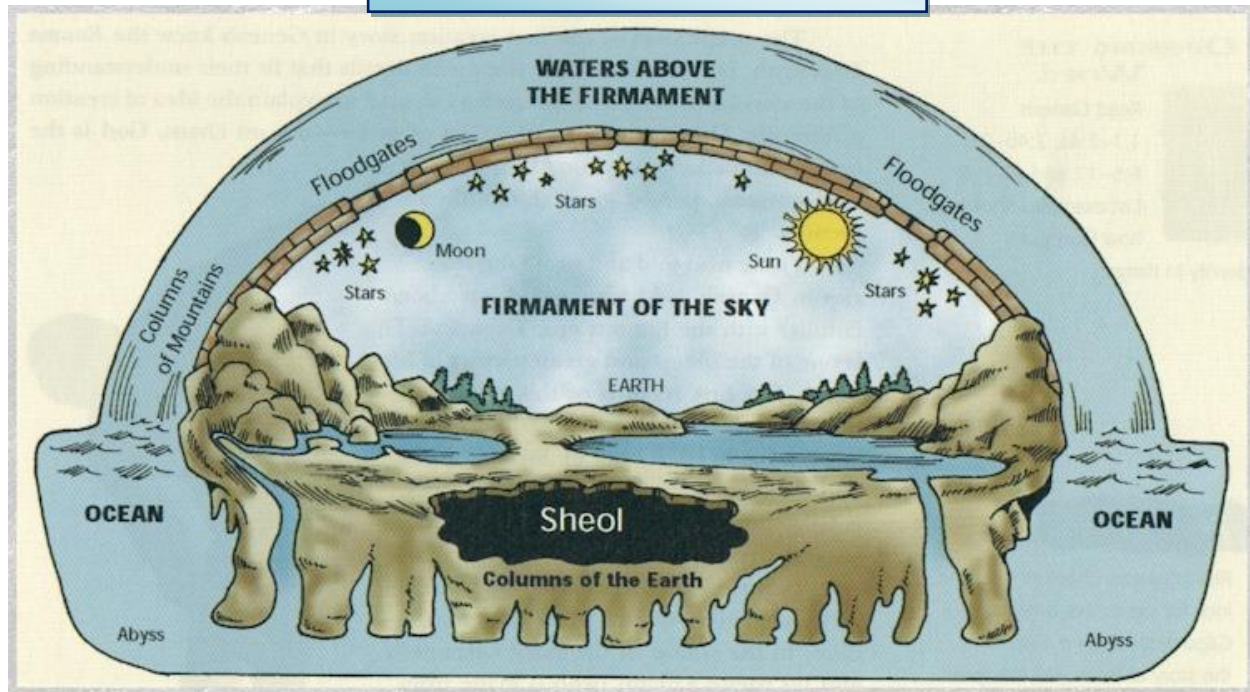
Revelation Study

Session 2

Revelation's Cosmology:

The following diagram illustrates how people in biblical times envisioned the cosmos:

Heaven: God's Throne Room



- Heaven was located above the “waters above the firmament (or sky).” God ruled the whole Creation from Heaven.
- Earth was envisioned as a kind of disk resting upon pillars that moored or anchored it as it floated upon the “Abyss.”
- The Firmament, or sky, was envisioned as a dome with windows and doors in it. The sun, moon and stars traveled across the surface of this dome.
- The Ocean was a part of the vast chaos that surrounded the created world. It was here that Chaos resided in the form of the monsters we encounter in Revelation.
- Strange and alarming signs in the Sky signaled judgment coming from above in Heaven, particularly upon sinful human kingdoms.

We find this cosmology throughout the Bible. In the Creation Story, we see God creating Light, then separating the waters by creating the Sky. Next, He separates dry land from the oceans.

As Psalm 24 tells us:

*The earth is the LORD's , and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the waters.*

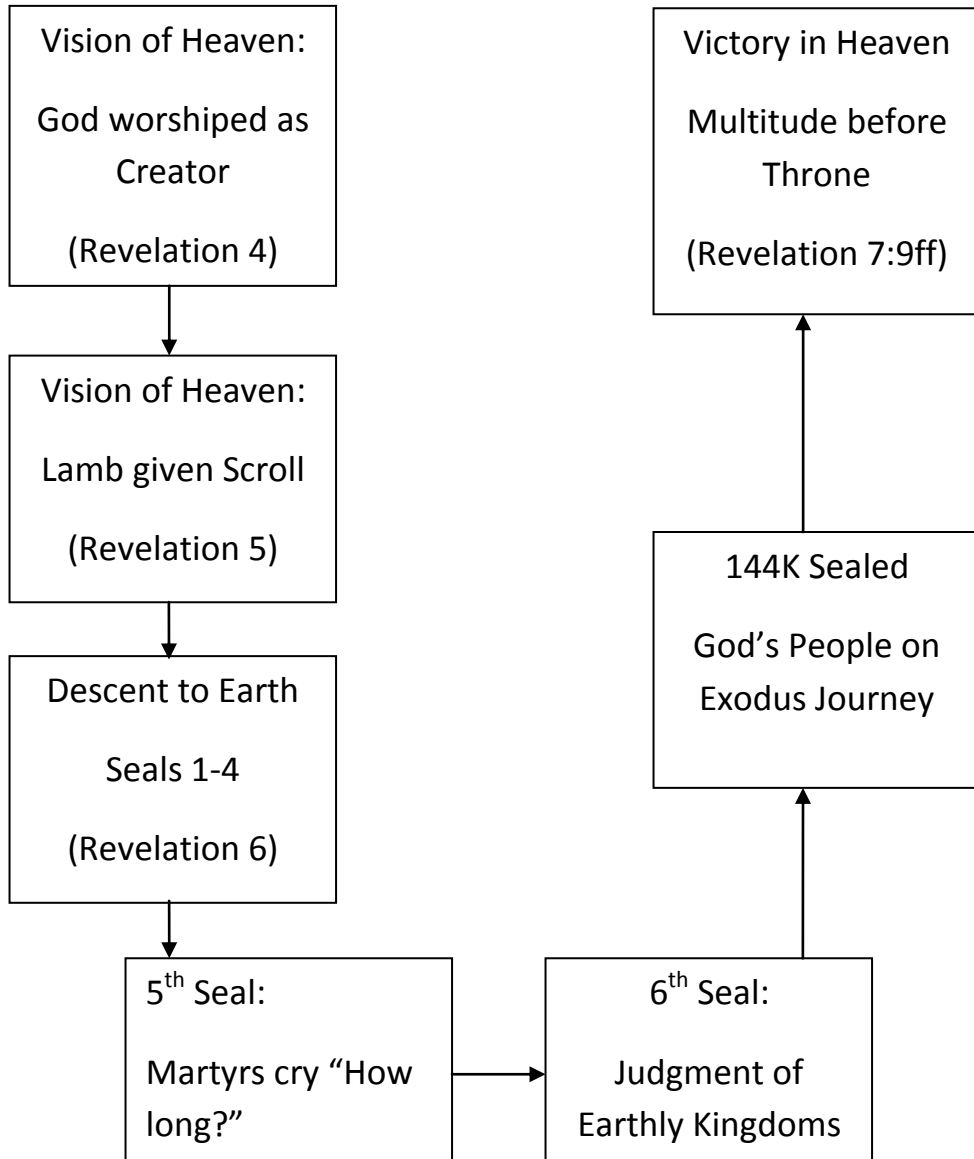
This helps us understand how John can speak of “a door standing open in heaven.” He travels from the earthly realm, through the dome of the sky, and into God’s Throne Room.

In the 2nd Vision Cycle we travel from Heaven down to Earth, and back to Heaven. The Number 4 represents Earth (4 corners, 4 winds, 4 Living Creatures, 4 designations of humanity, etc.). The Number 3 represents Heaven (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Add the two together and you get the number of completion or perfection. Multiply them and you get the number of the People of God: the 12 Tribes, the 144,000 who are sealed in Rev. 7.

James Resseguie explains that as we take the U Shaped Journey from Heaven to Earth and back to Heaven, the journey begins with a rapid descent (the first 4 seals), then slows down until we encounter God’s People on Exodus (the 144,000). They are in between the old and the new. Like the souls under the altar, they wonder, “How long?” But they are sealed by God’s Passover Lamb – the Lamb that was slain whom we met in chapter 5. This is where we find ourselves in the story. We are the New Israel – God’s people on the New Exodus Journey. Jesus is our Passover Lamb.

The final vision of the cycle not only brings us back to Heaven, but signals that the world has been repaired John concludes by saying: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes,” the same glorious promise that we read in chapter 21!

The Second Vision Cycle (Revelation 4-7)



The Three Challenges to the People of God:

- Assimilation: John offers a vision of the True God who alone deserves worship. (Revelation 4-5)
- Persecution: We see the martyrs at the opening of the 5th seal.
- Complacency: We are warned that God will judge the Earth (6th seal).

Discussion Questions (20 minutes):

1. As a group, take a few moments to discuss what you think the Lord is saying to us as His church at this particular time?

Divide up in groups of no more than 3 or 4 and take some time to share your answers to the following questions:

2. Share about a “How long, Lord?” moment in your life right now.
3. In what way does this situation remind you of the brokenness of our world?
4. How do you sense Jesus, our Passover Lamb, leading you in this situation?

Prayer Time (10 minutes):

Share requests – both personal and for us as a church – and pray for each other.

Next Week:

Next week we will be studying Revelation 8-11. See you next Wednesday!