

Revelation 5:1-14 ^{ESV}

¹ Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

² And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it,

⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "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."

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,

¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,

¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

“Then I Heard Every Creature in Heaven and on Earth”

The theologian, Karl Barth, always instructed his ministry students to read with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other so as to be current and relevant in preaching. Well, one of the top stories this week was the U.S. government's Securities and Exchanges Commission charging Wall Street's biggest investment firm, Goldman Sachs, with fraud. It appears that another company came to Goldman Sachs to get them to create a hedge fund in mortgages at the time when the housing market was starting to collapse. This other company knew the hedge fund would lose heavily and so they bought insurance to protect themselves and somehow made some money when the inevitable collapse happened; i.e., they were speculating on people losing their homes, made money, and its apparently legal to do that. Goldman Sachs was charged with fraud because they weren't telling other investors that this hedge fund, instead being a cushion to protect against other losses, was actually set up to lose money. This sort of risky tricky business was one of the things that helped cause the recession.

I believe I've ranted about this before, but for the life of me I cannot understand why anybody with any moral or ethical sense would call the investment business, securities and exchanges. There is nothing secure about it and the fact that people would speculate and indeed prosper on people losing their homes just makes me want to vomit. Just because governments say they regulate this stuff in no way makes it secure. We live in the midst of and are vulnerable to a global economy in which they only certainty is that greed will find a way and that a few will prosper at the unfortunate expense of many others.

This whole mess turns me into a bit of a conspiracy theorist and makes me ask what or who is behind it all. Leaning on Hollywood here, I bet 'cha in the middle of the night of President Obama's first night in the White House, he was secretly whisked away to a forgotten runway at Ronald Reagan International Airport where he met with the most powerful man in the world who due to terminal cancer circles the planet in a modified jet at an altitude that's nearly in space because the lessened gravity keeps the cancer from spreading. Since this man owns everything in the world, the gist of that conversation was to inform the President of the way things work in that man's world and of what the President can and cannot do. The "sick old man who controls everything from a high altitude airplane" theory is one of the most popular conspiracy theorist explanations for what's behind what goes on in this world. Yet, he is nothing more than a human form created to symbolize greed and power lust. Do we call the whole business Satanic or evil or is there good behind it meaning this global free market economy the best way to raise the living standards of all peoples? One thing for sure is that this economy is fallen just as we each are. It is good and evil at the same time, just as we each are. But anyway, what is the reality behind the economy in which we are forced to find security. Is it truly free, blown by the winds of "market forces"? Is it regulated chaos? Or, are there some people behind it who can make it do what they want?

Well, the Book of Revelation is given to us to give us the security that the will and reign of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is driving the reality behind the world in which we live. The culmination of it all is beautifully summarized in the testimony of this elderly, exile named John the Beloved. He says, "I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!'" Though it may appear to us that all Hell has broken loose in human history, what God the Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit is doing in history will culminate in every creature every where, and indeed all of creation, worshipping. The security that we have to lean on is that when all is said and done, whatever evil may befall us and it will, what God has in store for his creation is so unimaginably good that the universe and every creature there in will be spontaneously moved to worship.

This vision here in chapter five is all about human history, indeed the history of creation, being integrally bound to Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb who was slain, God the Son become human, the one who is in himself the indestructible reconciliation of God and humanity, the one whose very existence says we are forgiven of what we have done and will be healed of everything that has been done to us. Jesus crucified and risen is the only one worthy to open the scroll which contains the will of God for his creation. Only Jesus; and he is no dying old man circling the planet in a jet to prolong his death.

So, what is the reality behind what is going on in this, our world, in which every person and every event is both good and evil? Well, Jesus has conquered. The cross was a victory. It was a victory over sin and death that in the end reconciles us to God curing us of our alienation from God. The cross was a victory, a victory proved by Jesus' resurrection. Jesus has defeated sin and death and evil and is now calling forth a people who live freed from slavery to sin and death and who proclaim the Good News of Creation's salvation in Jesus and speak against evil in this world even at the expense of their own lives.

Jesus has bought, ransomed, redeemed people from the slavery of sin to be people of God and he did it at the price of his own blood. That's not some sort revivalist gimmick to get us all to feel guilty. To the Hebrew, blood is the life of a person or animal. Blood passed through the death of a sacrificial slaughter and sprinkled on a person kept them rightly related to God. Jesus gave his life, passed through death, and has sprinkled us with the Holy Spirit uniting us to himself and rightly relating us to God. Jesus giving his life for us isn't God's ploy to make us feel guilty. It is God's means of defeating sin and death that we might live knowing God personally. This just shatters this stuff that gets thrown around where people say Jesus died because of you and in your place so you better believe in him and tow God's line. Yes, Jesus did die because of us and in our place and the so of that is not a "you better" but so we can have faith in God and be able to tow his line. I hope you see that difference there because it is the difference between the grace of God and religious manipulation.

Moving on, Jesus bought us so that we might be the people through whom God's will is being done on earth as it is in heaven; God's people. As God's people, we are a kingdom and priests. We are an organized realm spread all over this earth where God's reign is becoming evident. There is a lot in the news now about the Roman Catholic Church and sexual abuse. This tells us that the church is still a fallen, human organization where good and evil happen; but even still, within this institution called the church, the reign of God breaks forth. I went to a healing service at St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Brampton last Wednesday. God healed people. People got healed. Some physically, some emotionally; people got healed – in a Presbyterian church of all places. This wasn't at some snake-handling-quasi-faith-healing-freaky-deaky-TV preacher-for profit revival. It was Saint Andrew's in Brampton. Jesus is alive and reigns and his reign is breaking through in the church despite the church! Last week, I said Jesus has paid the price and made us to be priests who lead Creation's worship. We have immediate access to God. We proclaim forgiveness. We pray. We worship. In this fallen world we are those who say "worthy is the lamb who was slain" in the face of those who slaughter the innocents for greed and power lust.

You know, and here I will wrap up, what's behind the free market economy is in the speculative realm of conspiracy theorists because it has to remain hidden to do the evil that it does. In this the Revelation of Jesus Christ what God is doing to save his creation and us with it is made known freely. It may sound lame or far-fetched to say that reality is that God the Father loves his creation and us so much that God the Son became human and was crucified to defeat the powers of sin, death, and evil; and purchased people from all peoples by giving us the gift of God the Holy Spirit to be God's kingdom and priests; and in the end every creature on earth and in heaven will worship God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in New Creation. It may sound lame and far-fetched to profess that God's love and will are where our security is, but...look at the alternative. Do we live and die for the security of securities and exchanges where greedy people full of power lust do things like speculate and make money on people losing their homes because they can and, God help us, because they can get away with it. Not me. I say, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" Let God's creation say, "Amen". Amen.