

500 Years of Grace
Soli Deo Gloria, Glory to God Alone
Revelation 5:1-14

preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church
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Today's Text

Revelation 5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of the One seated on the throne a scroll with writing on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 I also saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or even to look in it. 4 And I cried and cried because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or even to look in it.

5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Stop crying. Look! The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has been victorious so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals." 6 Then I saw One like a slaughtered lamb standing between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent into all the earth. 7 He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of the One seated on the throne.

8 When He took the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song:

*You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because You were slaughtered,
and You redeemed people
for God by Your blood
from every tribe and language
and people and nation.
10 You made them a kingdom
and priests to our God,
and they will reign on the earth.*

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and also of the living creatures and of the elders. Their number was countless thousands, plus thousands of thousands. 12 They said with a loud voice:

*The Lamb who was slaughtered is worthy
to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength
and honour and glory and blessing!*

13 I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say:

*Blessing and honour and glory and dominion
to the One seated on the throne,
and to the Lamb, forever and ever!*

14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Intro.

Today brings us to the end of our series on the Reformation. But I hope you have seen that these sermons have not been so much about the Reformation as about the recovery and the continuation of five precious truths known as the Five Solas: Scripture alone is our final authority (Sola Scriptura); Christ alone saves us (Solus Christus), by grace alone (Sola Gratia), through faith alone (Sola Fide), and, finally today, to the glory of God alone—Soli Deo Gloria.

To get into this last one, let's take the time to partially unpack today's text. We don't have time to go into as much detail as the passage deserves, but we can summarize a few important points.

Worship in Heaven

John is actually viewing a worship service in heaven that started back at the beginning of chapter 4. In that chapter John mostly describes the Heavenly throne room and the beings he finds there, both angelic and human. It's in chapter 5 that he gets specific about what was going on.

John sees God Himself sitting on heaven's throne and holding a scroll sealed with seven seals. Now those seven seals would immediately mean something to a first-century Roman. The seals meant this was a testament, a will, to be brought forward after death and unsealed, if possible by the seven witnesses who sealed it in the first place. If they were not available the seals had to be broken by a qualified official before a testament, or will, could be read and the inheritance distributed.

I hope your hearts and your ears are ready to hear what comes next. This testament (scroll) in Revelation 5 is nothing less than the Testament of the resurrected and ascended Christ. But the riches of Christ have nothing to do with mere money. Jesus' legacy is His very life, always represented by blood, and it is granted to us in the New Covenant.

Let me show you in the briefest form possible the covenant thread that extends throughout the Bible.

Old Covenant established at Sinai

Ex. 24:8 Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you concerning all these words."

New Covenant symbolized and foreshadowed by the cup

Luke 22:20 In the same way He also took the cup after supper and said, "This cup is the new covenant established by My blood; it is shed for you.

New Covenant established through Christ's death and resurrection

Heb. 9:12 He entered the most holy place once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Now we know why John “wept much” when he believed no one was worthy to break the seals and put the blessings of the New Covenant into effect. None of the better promises of the New Covenant could be granted because apart from Christ no one was worthy to open the seals.

But notice John's grief was short-lived. His attention was directed to someone identified as “the Lion from the tribe of Judah,” a reference to Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49 that the Messiah would be a descendant of his son Judah, whom he describes as a “young lion.” The one John sees is also called the “Root of David.” This is interesting because in the physical sense Jesus is an offspring of David. So how could He be David's root? The Bible teaches He is both things.

Rev. 22:16 I am the root *and* the offspring of David, the Bright Morning Star.

In other words, Jesus is both David's creator (the root) and David's son (offspring). More importantly, Jesus is the victorious One (triumphant over sin and death), and is therefore worthy to take the scroll, break its seals, and put the New Covenant into effect on the earth.

Look now at the response of the heavenly choir in verses 8 and 9. Well, it isn't really the choir. If you look at the text you will see that it's an ensemble of four living creatures plus 24 elders. In other words, it's the Gaither Vocal Band backed up by Ernie Haase, the Booth Brothers, the Cathedrals, Greater Vision and several other gospel greats.

Actually, who the singers were is less important than the new song they sang. As we read this song one more time I want you to pay special attention to the three things Jesus accomplished by his suffering and death. Remember, it was these three things that made Him worthy to open the seals and pour out the blessings of the New Covenant.

*You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because You were slaughtered,
and You redeemed people
for God by Your blood
from every tribe and language
and people and nation.
10 You made them a kingdom
and priests to our God,
and they will reign on the earth.*

I'm not going to take the time now to expound on each line. What I want you to see, is that this text is consistent with the entire New Testament—in every mention of salvation all the praise, all the glory, is continually credited to our Lord. “You were slaughtered.” In other words He alone paid the price for our rebellion against God. “You redeemed people.” It's very clear that Jesus

had to do it because no one one can do it for himself. “Who can produce something pure from what is impure?” Job asked. Then he gave the answer: “No one!” (Job 14:4)

Finally, “You made them a kingdom and priests to our God.” This is a reference to all that Jesus did for us through the new birth and the transformative power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. He has made of us something completely different from anything we were before. That’s why it’s called a New Birth, because what Jesus does in us is of the same quality as as the original creation.

In the new birth Jesus makes us something out of the nothing we were before. Just like the chaos that reigned before the original creation, our souls are dead and dark until Jesus brings light and life. Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 2:4. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, 5 made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses.”

To God be all the glory!

This brings us, then, to the main point for today’s message. If we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone, and if the knowledge of salvation rests entirely upon Scripture alone, God’s inspired Word, then all the glory for every aspect of our salvation and life must go to God alone! This is the consistent report of Scripture, and especially the book of Revelation.

Look again at today’s text. In all that we’ve read today, do you see heaven’s inhabitants giving even a tiny particle of credit to man for having gotten himself into heaven? No! You do not! Instead, again and again, God is thanked and praised and Christ is glorified for being a complete Saviour.

Look at Rev. 7:10. Here we have the vast crowd of Christ’s redeemed, a number, John says, that no man could number, and what is it that they cry? “Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” I ask again, do the songs and sayings of heaven describe a shared salvation? Does some of it belong to God and some little portion of it belong to us? No? Then all the glory goes to God!

Even when Biblical language makes it appear at first glance that man is supposed to do something, the will and the strength to do that thing is always attributed to God. “For you are saved by grace through faith, *and this is not from yourselves*; it is God’s gift,” Paul says in Eph. 2:8—not from works, so that no one can boast.” Yes, when you believe in Jesus the faith is yours, but “it is not from yourselves,” it is yours because it is God’s gift to you.

God help us to see that the Bible is consistent throughout; All the glory for our salvation goes to God. Why? Because everything about it, the work of Christ on Calvary, the eye that sees and the mind that understands what Christ was actually doing there, along with the heart that loves and the will that believes—all of this is God’s work, and all the glory goes to Him! Think of the two thieves on either side of the cross. One believed and one did not. Will the believing thief spend eternity patting himself on the back for his last minute reformation? Are you kidding? In heaven

he will say exactly what he said on earth: “I was punished justly, I deserved nothing. It was grace alone that saved me! All the glory goes to God!”

No glory goes to the church; she witnesses to God’s great salvation, but she contributes nothing to it. No glory goes to the priest or the evangelist; again, all of us are called to proclaim God’s grace, but He alone does the saving! And it is absolutely certain that no glory goes to the wicked heart that all of us possessed at birth.

In the same vein no credit goes to our confession of faith, or to our baptism, or faithful attendance at church or regular partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Nor do we add anything by large gifts or sacrificial service. No, if we are truly saved, all the glory goes to the One who gave us a new heart in the new birth. This is the root meaning of *Soli Deo Gloria*, to the glory of God alone!

Application

1. Think about the Lord’s Prayer. How does it begin? Matt. 6:9 “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”
 - a. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer we are praying that it will be in our hearts like it is in heaven—that God will rule within each of us just as He rules in His own throne room.
 - b. That raises the question, of course, how does God rule in heaven? I once heard someone summarize the meaning of this prayer in three words. “In heaven God’s will is done immediately, fully, and joyfully!”
 - c. Focus with me on that last word. It seems to me that the key to earthly joy is to bring the spirit of heaven into our daily lives. And what is the spirit of heaven? It is the readiness to give God the glory for everything, including every part of our salvation!
2. We ought, therefore, to learn to rest in the Salvation that God has granted to us. You see, if all the glory for our salvation goes to Christ, then our salvation is a settled fact. Why? Because God will not allow any trace of imperfection to be attached to His Name or reputation. We do not have to worry about holding onto Him. Instead, we can rejoice that He is holding onto us! He has to, otherwise He could not be a perfect Saviour.

John 10:27 My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. 30 The Father and I are one.”

Psalms 125:1 Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion. It cannot be shaken; it remains forever. 2 Jerusalem—the mountains surround her. And the Lord surrounds His people, both now and forever.

3. If God gets all the glory for our salvation, then you can expect Him to take His responsibility seriously.

Phil. 1: 6 I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

- a. This is the Bible's big proof of salvation; if you are truly born again God will carry to completion the good work He began in you. Is God carrying on the work of salvation in your life? Remember, His reputation, His glory rests on "saving completely those who come to God through Christ" (Heb. 7:25).
- b. Let me ask you some questions. (1) Are you growing in Christ-likeness? (2) Does the Word of God effectively call you to new levels of obedience, new ways of offering yourself to God as a living sacrifice? Does it effectively convict you of sin. Equally, does the Word of God strengthen and sustain you? For example, does this verse mean anything to you in your experience?

I Peter 5:10 Now the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will personally restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little. 11 The dominion belongs to Him forever.

- c. Does the cross of Christ grow more precious as you sense it being worked deeper and deeper into your own heart. Can you forgive more fully, and more easily than you did in earlier times. Are you beginning to experience the glory of self-denial for the sake of Christ?

I could go on, but time is up. Let me finish with this. Luther biographer Roland Bainton has written that in 300 years the only German who fully understood Luther was Johann Sebastian Bach, the great composer. Do you know what the musicologists find written in the margins of Bach's music manuscripts? Over and over the initials SDG. Soli Deo Gloria, to the glory of God alone. May those same initials be etched on the margins of all our lives.