

REVELATION 5:6-10

WHAT HAS JESUS DONE FOR US?

“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. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 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. 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,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.””¹

“**T**he Me Generation” is a popular designation given to individuals born between 1943 and 1960. This group is also referred to as part of the “Baby Boomers.” The generation is characterised to a significant extent by a self-centred attitude. “What’s in it for me?” is frequently asked whenever individuals within this generation are asked to sacrifice. Told they were the centre of the universe, many of this generation believe that they are deserving of every benefit that was secured through the sacrifice of their parents’ generation. Every conceivable comfort is their right, without any personal sacrifice expected.

Since I am included within this age group, perhaps it is not unexpected that I think in terms of benefits whenever I consider the cost of an activity. I confess that I approached the Faith with a bit of a hardnosed attitude. “What’s in it for me?” was a question that occurred to me frequently in the early explorations of the Faith. I believe that I have progressed far beyond that question, however, as I have discovered the majesty of the Risen, Reigning Christ. He is worthy of my best efforts to glorify His Name because of who He is. However, this does not mean that there are no benefits to the Faith.

I am confident that today I would choose to be a Christian even were there no immediate benefits. I would choose to serve God because of who He is and not for what He is able to do. I have discovered that God is worthy of my highest praise and by best efforts to serve Him. With Job, I have learned to say, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him” [**JOB 13:15**]. It remains that though God is gracious, we yet may well ask, “What has Jesus done for me?” We need not fear that He will come up short, because when we ask what Jesus has done for us we will discover that God is generous in the extreme.

Though I could undoubtedly appeal to any of a number of passages that speak of God’s goodness and generosity to us who believe, I invite you to consider a passage found in the Apocalypse. John draws back the curtain that separates time from eternity, permitting us a glimpse of the people of God at worship in heaven. The basis for worshipping the Lamb of God is what is especially important for our meditation this day.

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THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN — The focus of the message is Christ the Lord. However, the text dictates that we look back to His accomplished work, rather than looking forward to His promised work. We who are Christians presently enjoy great benefits because of our relationship to Christ the Lord. We have forgiveness of sin. We have peace with God. We enjoy immediate access into His presence. We have His authority to announce life for all who receive Him as Lord. We are called by His Name and known as His people. We have His Spirit living within us and empowering us to accomplish great deeds in the Name of Christ our Lord.

There is no question but that we who are saved shall enjoy great benefits throughout all eternity. We shall dwell with God and we shall reign with Christ. We will soon receive the adoption as sons, for we have a full inheritance by His grace and through His mercies. We are appointed to serve Him throughout eternity, enjoying the glorified body that He has promised. Perhaps we are disappointed on occasion because we imagine that we have not received what we want, but in our hearts we know that we have received more than we deserve and we shall yet receive rich gifts from our gracious and generous Saviour.

According to John, the praise that believers will offer in Heaven looks back to the work that our Lord performed at the cross. Before we consider that work, we need to establish who is offering this praise. John has introduced twenty-four elders, and in order to determine who “the twenty-four elders” are, we should review the scene that is unfolded before us.

John provides an outline of the Book of the Apocalypse in **REVELATION 1:19**. There, the glorified Saviour commands, “Write ... the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.” That which John had seen is the subject of the first chapter. Chapters two and three describe the things that are—in these chapters, John provides an outline of the Church Age, the present Dispensation of Grace. Then, with chapter four, we are introduced to “those [things] that are to take place after this.” The remainder of the book is prophetic, describing God’s plan for the ages.

John was permitted to peer into Heaven itself. Transported in the spirit, he witnessed God’s throne and surrounding the throne were cherubim praising God and continually saying,

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!”

[**REVELATION 4:8**]

We are also introduced to “twenty-four elders” seated on twenty-four thrones [**REVELATION 4:4**]. It is these elders who initiate worship of the Lamb of God in our text.

These elders cannot be angels; angels are never referred to as elders (Greek *presbutéros*) in Scripture, the term is always used of men. Frankly, the term would be inappropriate for angels who never age. Moreover, angels are never described elsewhere in Scripture as being seated in the presence of God. Always and ever when we see angels portrayed in the Word, they are active, serving Him and rushing to obey His will.

Though angels in select instances can be referred to as “thrones,” (e.g. **COLOSSIANS 1:16**), they are never said to be seated on thrones. However, the promise of those who are resurrected to life is that they shall be seated on thrones. This is the promise to those who are saved. Perhaps you will recall the promise of the Master to the Church in Laodicea—a promise that applies ultimately to all believers, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also conquered and sat down with My Father on His throne” [**REVELATION 3:21**].

John writes of the days immediately before the conclusion of the Millennium, “I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed... They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years... Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him for a thousand years” [REVELATION 20:4, 6].

These elders are described as clothed in white and wearing crowns [REVELATION 4:4]. These are not regal diadems (*diādēma*) such as those worn by rulers, but rather they are the crowns of victors (*stéphanos*). Included among the crowns will be “the crown of life” that James describes [JAMES 1:12]. Undoubtedly the crown to which Paul refers as he draws his final letter to Timothy to a close is also represented here. “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing” [2 TIMOTHY 4:8]. I would anticipate that “the unfading crown of glory” promised for faithful service in Peter’s first letter will likewise be represented here [1 PETER 5:4]. Though we shall indeed reign with Christ, we reign as those who have conquered through obedience to Him and by His grace. We cannot claim that our strength will suffice to secure the honour that we shall receive from our gracious Sovereign.

These elders are clothed in white garments. In Scripture, white garments are consistently associated with and promised to believers who overcome the flesh, the world and the devil. Speaking to the Church in Sardis—and thus to all who are faithful before the Master whatever their circumstance, Jesus promises that those who had not soiled their garments through succumbing to sin “will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” [REVELATION 3:4, 5].

Later, we read of the Bride of Christ,

“‘It was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure’—

“for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” [REVELATION 19:8]. The Bride of Christ refers to the saved of this present age. Before Him, she displays the righteous deeds, as though dressed in fine linen.

I conclude that these twenty-four elders represent the saved of this present dispensation. This leaves the timing of the scene to be considered before we focus on the One who is praised. The worship that John describes is taking place before the Great Tribulation is unleashed on the earth. Those awful days are described in detail beginning with chapter six. However, in the scene before us, the judgements that are to be unleashed on the earth have not begun.

Therefore, we see the saved of the Dispensation of Grace, the Church Age, gathered before the throne of God. We realise that the Resurrection and the Rapture have already taken place and the people of God have begun to reign with Christ as He promised. The believers see the closed book, which lies untouched in the hand of Him that is seated on the throne. They witness the Lamb as He comes to receive that book, and they praise Him as worthy to open it. Then, falling down from their thrones, they worship Him as He takes the book. They witness the multitudes that come out of the Great Tribulation [REVELATION 7:11-14]. Later, when the hundred forty-four thousand gather about the Lamb, these elders still have a distinct position. And they are spectators of the judgement of great Babylon, shouting “Hallelujah” as they witness her fall [REVELATION 19:4].

To this point in the book, the raptured saints worship before the throne of God, and though the Spirit of God was in evidence [REVELATION 4:5], the Son of God was not seen. John wept at the knowledge that in the hand of God was a scroll sealed with seven seals. Neither in heaven nor on earth was anyone found who was worthy to break the seals and unroll the scroll. However, one of the elders consoled John, saying “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” [REVELATION 5:5]. When John composes himself and looks, he sees not a Lion, but a Lamb standing next to the throne of the Living God. Moreover, John is careful to describes this One as “a Lamb ... as though it had been slain.”

He is presented as a “little lamb” [lit. meaning of *arníon*], or perhaps a “precious lamb” [implied by the time John wrote]. The emphasis appears to be upon the non-threatening nature or weakness of the Lamb rather than upon the age. The imagery is derived from EXODUS 12:3-6. “Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbour shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.”

The Lamb John saw is endowed with wisdom and understanding from the Spirit of God. The picture John drafts captures in one brilliant stroke the central theme of New Testament revelation, which is victory through sacrifice. As the Lion of Judah, Jesus is the judge of the entire universe. As the Lamb of God, He is judged for the sin of mankind. As the Lion of Judah, he governs the world. As the humble Lamb of God, He reveals the grace of God. It may interest you to know that twenty-nine times in twenty-seven verses, John refers to Jesus as the Lamb in this book, and only once does an angel identify Him as the Lion of Judah. Though our Lord is Judge of the universe, throughout the book the emphasis is upon His sacrifice.

The one visible aspect of the Lamb that seems especially to attract John’s attention is the fact that He still bore the marks of ritual sacrifice. When the Son of God was first presented for His ministry in Judah, the Baptist announced Him as “the Lamb of God” [JOHN 1:29, 36]. The emphasis of John’s announcement was upon His coming to sacrifice Himself for sinful man. Now, as the Evangelist sees Him in Heaven, the emphasis is again upon His willing sacrifice.

When He was in the flesh, Jesus testified that “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and *to give His life as a ransom for many*” [MARK 10:45]. He was quite specific that He would sacrifice His life for His people. “The Father knows Me and I know the Father; and *I lay down My life for the sheep*... For this reason the Father loves Me, because *I lay down My life* that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but *I lay it down of My own accord*. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” [JOHN 10:15, 17, 18].

How bold the Apostles proved to be when they were filled with the Spirit of God! They were so unlike contemporary preachers. They were not afraid to say that those who did not believe were lost. They fearlessly charged the Jewish leaders with deicide—murder of the Son of God, “The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him” [ACTS 5:30-32]. Before the Gentiles they testified, “[the Jewish leaders] put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him on the third day” [ACTS 10:39b, 40].

PRAISE TO THE LAMB — In the text, the twenty-four elders each hold a harp and a golden bowl of incense. As they worship, they sing a new song, consisting of praise to the Lamb. Contrasting the song that the people of God sing with the praise of the angels described soon after, I note a significant difference. The people of God glorify the Saviour because of redemption; the angels glorify the Master because of His obedience. No angel can fully understand what it means to be saved; but the redeemed sing of the salvation they have received.

Peter gives us insight into the unfulfilled curiosity that marks the angels when he writes, “Concerning ... salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the Good News to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.” Now, underscore in your Bible the clause that follows this assertion, “*things into which angels long to look*” [1 PETER 1:10-12].

While the words of the song are vital to our understanding of worship, it is the accoutrements of worship that demonstrate what appropriate and acceptable worship is to be. The harp and the bowl reveal a matter of greatest significance concerning acceptable worship. In modern churches, singing is worship. It is common for churches to have “worship teams,” which usually consists of musicians and singers. The congregation “worships,” and then they have a message, if such is tolerated. That is not what we learn from observing worship in Heaven, however. The accoutrements described are at least as important, if not more so, than the song itself, for the accoutrements delineate what is acceptable worship before the Lamb of God.

Throughout the pages of Scripture, the harp, or the lyre, is indicative of prophetic ministry; it is a sign of the prophet. For instance, in 1 SAMUEL 10:5 we read that Saul was to go to Gibeath-elohim. Approaching the town, he would meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute and lyre being played before them as they neared. The prophets would be prophesying—speaking the mind of God to the people. The prophets are carrying harps.

When Elisha prophesied before Jehoshaphat and Jehoram, it was to the accompaniment of a harpist playing on a harp [2 KINGS 3:15]. Those servants of the Temple whom David set apart to the ministry of prophesying were accompanied by harps [see 1 CHRONICLES 25:1, 3]. The Psalmist also speaks of the harp as the means of accompaniment as God reveals His glories. The harp is associated with the prophetic ministry and with worship of God.

“I will learn a song that imparts wisdom;
I will then sing my insightful song to
the accompaniment of the harp.”

[PSALM 49:4]²

Delightful though songs may be, it is the preaching of the Word that turns hearts to God. As saints in Heaven worship, they will always remember that they are present by the prophetic ministry of the Word. True worship will *always* have the preached Word of God as a solid foundation and will point toward the promises of God given through His Word. Without the declaration of the Word of God, there can be no worship acceptable to the Master.

² NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

It would be good for us to recall the commentary the Apostle provides on this issue. “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” [ROMANS 10:14, 15]!

True worship requires that the worshipper be grounded in the Word, for worship is rooted in the Word. As we worship, we offer back to God the praise which we have been taught through His Word. God revealed His character through the Word, and as we discover each perfection in His Person, we marvel. All the prophets point to Christ. His sacrifice, His mercies, His kindness toward mankind is as a scarlet thread woven throughout the Word. Throughout all eternity we who are saved shall reflect the glories of this eternal Word of God. Amen!

I also see as well that the elders—the redeemed saints of God in glory—hold golden bowls filled with incense. We need not wonder what this means, for God hastens to tell us that these are “the prayers of the saints” [VERSE 8]. Under the Old Covenant, as the high priest entered into the Temple, he carried a censer filled with incense [LEVITICUS 16:11-13]. The smoke of that incense ascended before the Lord. In a similar manner, the prayers of God’s people ascend before God as a sweet aroma. The prayers which we have offered are a sweet remembrance of worship before God. The Master taught us to pray, “Your Kingdom come” [MATTHEW 6:10], and at last the Kingdom will have come. At last, His will shall be done and the prayers of His people throughout millennia will be fulfilled.

From this, I discover that worship which fails to motivate me to pray is no worship. Worship which fails to seek the Lord’s will is no worship at all; worship which seeks only my personal contentment is no worship at all. Worship in Heaven—the worship for which we are now being prepared—leads to offering up our prayers before the throne of the Lord our God. True worship leads the people of God to intercede for those in need. Throughout eternity, we shall hold the prayers which we have offered as sweet incense before the throne of God.

Similarly, worship in Heaven has as its basis the Word which God gave to His people. Thus, worship which fails to present the Word is no worship at all. For a moment, consider that singing hymns—if those hymns fail to reflect the Word which God gave—falls short of biblical worship. Singing catchy songs which fail to reflect the character of God as revealed through His Word is worship which cannot honour Him. That service which fails to call worshippers to receive the preached Word is no worship at all. That service which delivers a book review or some sermonette for Christianettes is no worship at all. Worship always has at the heart the prophetic Word of God; it points us to Christ and calls us to submit to His reign. Amen.

Assess the worship in the congregation where you worship. What is the emphasis? When the congregation worships, is the music—the melody and the rhythm—central to worship? Do “worship leaders” present their music and then tune out? Does their speech reflect a bifurcation between “worship” and preaching? Does the worship induce you to seek the ear of the Lord? Is prayer the natural outgrowth of what is done during the service? Throughout the service, is the focus on will of God as revealed through the Word of God? Having participated in the worship, are you aware of the will of God? Or do you find that you are able to sit through the service and then ignore what you heard after you have left the building?

Worship should lead us to glorify the Saviour because of what He has done for us. I do not mean that we should not be aware of what He is now doing in our midst or that we should permit ourselves to be ignorant of what He has promised to do for us in the future. However, all that is done and all that shall be done by God for His people is because of His sacrifice.

THE LAMB'S GREAT WORK — When the Lamb takes the scroll from the hand of the One seated on the throne, the elders break out in song. It is not, as is so often the case with our music, an exclamation of how they feel, but their song is substantive praise because of what the Lamb has done! True praise consists of recitation of the accomplishments of the one praised; and in the case of the Son of God, praise that is acceptable before God looks back to what the Master accomplished in giving His life, for all that follows—whether present benefits of salvation or those aspects that are shortly to follow—are predicated upon what He has already done for us.

Throughout Scripture are multiplied statements that describe the work that Christ the Lord has already performed. For instance, we are told that believers “are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins” [**ROMANS 3:24, 25**].

Again, “God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life” [**ROMANS 5:8-10**].

And yet once more, “In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” [**EPHESIANS 1:7**].

Considering the work of the Saviour, Paul reviews his response in light of the sacrifice of the Master. He writes, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” [**GALATIANS 2:20**].

Few books of the New Testament are clearer in presenting the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice for sin than the Letter to Hebrew Christians. One extended passage reads as follows. “It was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

“Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

““Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings

you have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book."""

"When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' (these are offered according to the law), then he added, 'Behold, I have come to do your will.' He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

"And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" [**HEBREWS 9:23-10:14**].

According to the song of saints in heaven, we will praise the Lamb because by His blood He "ransomed people for God." Each of us will be in His presence by His grace, and not through our own efforts. The artificial divisions that identify us on earth will have been abolished, for Christ does not discriminate on the basis of tribe or language or culture or nation. Rather, before Him, we will have been made into a kingdom of priests. With Him, we shall reign on the earth. This is the heritage of those who are redeemed by Christ the Saviour.

There is a glorious future for the people of God; and that future is all because He sacrificed Himself because of our inability resulting from our sinful, fallen condition. Though at the moment we may be despised by the world, we are nevertheless destined to reign with Christ. Though we may be seen by our peers as fanatics, people who have made obviously poor choices in what we believe and in whom we will serve, we are nevertheless destined to receive the adoption as sons of the True and Living God. Already we have the earnest of our inheritance, His Holy Spirit, living within us and among us.

We are approaching Christmas Day when we remember that the Son of God became man. As we remember His birth, I urge each believer to remember the reason for His coming. He came so that He might give His life as an offering for our sin. This act was evidence of His great love for us, for we were without hope and without God in the world before He came. Now, in Him, we have the forgiveness of sin, the freedom to come into the presence of the Father, the hope of the resurrection, and the promise that we will be changed into His image. No wonder, then, that for the child of God Christmas is such a joyous occasion.

Do you have this joy? Do you know that your sins are forgiven? Do you know that you are accepted in God's beloved Son? The Word of God invites each individual to life as they receive the Son of God as Master of life. This is the reason the Word of God promises, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." That passage concludes with this promise first written by Joel, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

And that is our invitation to each person as we rejoice in this blessed Advent Season. Believe the Son of God; receive the free gift of life that He now offers. I pray that each one hearing this message will be present in that glorified throng that will sing a new song before the throne of God and in the presence of the Lamb of God. May God bless us with His grace and with life in His beloved Son. Amen.