

REVELATION 5:1-14
JESUS IS KING

- Christians in Ukraine wondering where their peace and security will come from in the midst of war?
- People wrestling with ill health, their own or someone else's, wondering how will it end?
- People in Scotland afraid of the future, given what will happen on September 18th in the referendum?
- Churches in Edinburgh anxious about the future, small, weak, are they viable? Will they disappear?
- Christians in Northern Iraq, fearful for their future; they know brothers and sisters who have been killed by IS!
- A group of young women struggling to come to terms with the illness of their friend.
- Christians in Syria, afraid to go to worship because that would be to declare an allegiance that is unwelcome in much of their society.
- People in our community, working hard to make ends meet; where will the next job be?
- Christians in ministry and many seem not to want what we offer; what is God doing?
- Christians persecuted for their faith, in prison, and their brothers and sisters meet for worship in fear.

All of these fears and frustrations and questions have crossed my path in the last month! How many more can we find if we look even harder. We look at the world, we look at life, and we wonder what is going on in the world. If we are people of faith, we wonder "what is God doing? Where is God in all of this?" We struggle to see any pattern, any good, in a tough and troubled world. In our worst moments we see only despair and darkness, and sometimes our anger boils over and we express that to God too! We have little sense of hope for the future, or only just a glimmer; there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but we worry that this light is the front of the oncoming train! Where does our hope come from? Is there hope in our tough and troubled life? There is an undoubted "yes"; we can clearly affirm that God has not left arena; God is still in the neighbourhood and is still at work. How can I say that? Revelation chapter 5 tells me!

Before the summer, we looked at Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the letters to young churches and someone said to me "I'm glad you're tackling Revelation"; "but only the easy bits" was my reply! Today, through the eyes of chapter 5 here's the rest of Revelation in 10 minutes! Why? Well, Revelation was given to Christians for whom life and the world was tough; they were persecuted people, in prison, martyrs for their faith; their church leader was in exile, John was away from Ephesus and on the island of Patmos. Were the Christians wondering what God is doing? Caesar really is Lord because the world is in his hands! But God has a different plan. The whole book of Revelation tells us that the world is in God's hands and that Jesus is Lord! If nothing else today, that is what Revelation 5 (and all the rest of the book) tells us - Jesus is Lord and has the whole world, the whole of life, in His hands! All I'm going to do now is fill that out a bit!

We are in the throne room of heaven; God is on His throne, king of everything. He has a scroll in His hand it is sealed, unopened. There is a great outcry because nobody is able to open the scroll, none is worthy to do it. This scroll contains the great plans and purposes of God for the world, what will happen next. As long as it remains unopened, these great purposes of God remain secret and, worse, remain unfulfilled; the scroll needs to be opened to get the show on the road, these purposes started. There is an outcry, a sense of frustration, even fear because the scroll is

unopened. But then, One steps forward: He is both worthy and able. He is worthy to open the scroll and able to open the scroll; He is none other than Jesus, the centre of the universe, the centre of history; He is both worthy and able and so He takes the scroll from the hand of God and will open the seals and the plans and purposes of God for what happens next will begin. The rest of the book tells the rest of the story in dramatic pictures; some of it good, some of it bad. There are days of trouble, war, famine, plague; there are days of blessing; Armageddon, the great final battle between good and evil will take place and finally the new heaven and the new earth that God will make is pictured and there will be no more pain and suffering, no more evil and tears and all will be perfect peace in the presence of God. This is the purpose in God's mind and He is working that purpose out in the world. At the centre stands Jesus!

"Then one..." (Revelation 5:5) Jesus is the Lion, full of courage, might, even ferocity. There is a famous quote from C.S. Lewis, about Aslan, the lion in his story, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: Lucy is told that she is about to meet Aslan; she asks 'is he is a man?' and is told that he is a lion. She asks if he is safe. "Safe? Said Mr Beaver. "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe, but He's good. He's the King, I tell you." Jesus the Lion, the strong king, full of power and courage; He is certainly not safe! But He's king. Jesus is the King of the universe, the king of all creation, and He stands at the centre of human history. For Christians He stands at the centre of our future hope. In every situation that makes us afraid, ultimately Jesus is King; He is the One who has all of life, time and eternity in His hands. That does not mean that everything is good; that does not mean that we are puppets in His hands; even in Revelation there are dark days, days when people suffer; we have choices to make about life and we try to make choices that honour Jesus as King! Nonetheless, Jesus the Lion, is a strong and powerful King!

"Then I..." (Revelation 5:6) Here is a different animal, a different picture, the Lamb; the key feature of the lamb *"As if..." (Revelation 5:6)* bearing the scars and marks of suffering and death; this is a clear reference to the cross, to Jesus' death, the lamb suffering, dying. As the Lion is full of power and might, so the lamb is full of humiliation and sacrifice. At the heart of God's plan and purpose for the world stands Jesus, the lamb, the One who suffered and died to save the world; God's rescue plan for the troubled world was Jesus, crucified. How strange, yet how marvellous. The One who is able and worthy to reveal the great plans and purposes of God for the world is One who is humble, who suffered and died for our troubled world. The Lamb lives and stands at the centre of the universe. It is impossible to overstate the importance of Jesus for the world; He is at the centre of everything as far as God is concerned. At the centre of everything stands One who once suffered and died for us. The horns and the eyes of the lamb suggest that this lamb is strong, able to meet every occasion and that nothing escapes Him. (par Wilcock)

"He bears the emblems of His lion-like greatness... and the marks of His lamb-like humiliation." (Wilcock) Why does this matter? For people of faith, this is something huge! There are two things about this king: first of all, He is able to meet every situation; nothing is beyond His power; the Lion is not safe, but He is strong and powerful and He is able; *"now to Him..." (Ephesians 3:20)* *"He is able..." (Hebrews 7:25)* There is nothing He cannot do. This is our King, Jesus. Nothing that frightens us, or frustrates us, is beyond His power to do something about. It is not Islamic State that has the future of Iraq in their hands ultimately; it is not sickness and illness, it is not even death, that has the last word for Christians; ultimately the last word in every situation and circumstance is with King Jesus. We're not always sure how God is working out that purpose, but Jesus is King. Who knows what will happen on September 18th, but on 19th September Jesus will still be King of the universe, will still be our King!

Secondly, He shares our suffering and cares for us. Not only is Jesus able to help us, but He has already shown us how much He cares for us; He gave His life. The centre of God's plans for the universe and for us is the cross! That's a huge statement to make, but that's what the Bible tells us; the King of universe is pictured as a lamb that has been slain. God who is working out His purposes for the world, does so through the cross of Jesus, the suffering of Jesus, the scars of Jesus. We want to know where God is when life is tough for us; we want to know why God lets these things happen to us; for us these are part and parcel of life; for Jesus they were a choice He made out of love for a lost and troubled world. This too, is our King!

We can't possibly consider all the ups and downs of life in Revelation today; the book is not meant as a history book, but as a picture book of life and the world as it will happen for us. There are some good bits, there are some bits when life is awful for the people of God. But through it all God is creating a people; He is loving, sustaining, building a people. In the end, God will create a new world and the last two chapters of the book are all about the new heaven and the new earth that God is creating, when there will be no more suffering and pain, no more tears and crying. God will be at the centre of His people and His people will live in the presence of God and everything will be good, and these will be days of perfect peace and joy. This will come about when Jesus comes back to the world. So John ends his book with a prayer: "*Come...*" (*Revelation 22:20*) This is the Christian's great hope! "That's just wishful thinking, preacher; pie in sky to make us feel better!" Well, no! This is the promise Jesus makes to us, Jesus of the cross and resurrection; this is His promise, a promise that stands for ever and from which to take heart.

This is not about politics and wars and empires; this is about a people: "*You are...*" (*Revelation 5:9f*) The people of God are everywhere, a great world-wide family of people who love and trust Jesus. God is building this people. This is not about world-wide domination, but about people who serve the Lord and live for Him. That is the challenge for us in our world: to love and serve the Lord! It is expressed in worship: a huge challenge for many people is to keep coming to Church when life is tough and so many stop and give up and how hard it is to come back; even when life and the world is tough, somehow we have to sustain that sense of love for the Lord and continue to express that in worship. We trust Jesus: Revelation asks persecuted Christians, being martyred for faith, to trust Jesus; Revelation asks us to trust and keep trusting Jesus. We are to be good people: how can Christians love the city that puts them in prison? How can Christians love the city that throws them to the lions? How can Christians love the city that tells them they are scum? That's the challenge of Revelation 5 for its first audience! The challenge of Revelation 5 for us is to not only love the Lord, but to keep loving the Lord and to continue doing good and loving the world that pushes Jesus out. It's what Jesus did!

Jesus: lion-like is His courage, might, greatness; nothing will defeat Him, nothing will scare Him away, nothing will deter Him from finishing the work He has begun. Jesus: lamb-like in His humility, love, suffering, sacrifice; He knows us and everything we face; He loves us and walks with us through all the walks of life. He is building a people who will belong to Him for ever and nothing will stop Him. To love and serve the Lord: that's our challenge and to keep loving and serving the Lord; to love Jesus and week by week to express that love in worship; to serve the Lord, to trust Him with our lives and with every situation, to do good in the world and love the world in which we live, to keep the faith and share the faith, to wrestle with issues and help others who wrestle with these issues; to be angry in the presence of God and then to recognise that He knows whole story, the end from the beginning. Jesus is King; we are people of the King, the Lion and the Lamb. Love and serve the Lord always!