

At 3:30 p.m. on June 6, 2007, a 21-year-old man with muscular dystrophy named Ben Carpenter drove his electric-powered wheelchair down the sidewalk in Paw Paw, Michigan. As he approached the street crossing at the corner of Red Arrow Highway at Hazen Street, a semi truck came to a halt at the stoplight. Ben began to cross the street from the north to the south in his wheelchair just a few feet in front of the towering truck.

When the light turned green, somehow the 52-year-old driver of the truck did not see Ben in his wheelchair. With Ben still in front of the truck, the engine roared to life, and the mammoth vehicle pulled forward. When the truck struck Ben's wheelchair, the wheelchair turned, now facing forward, and the handles in the back of the wheelchair became wedged in the truck's grille. The wheelchair kept rolling, though, and Ben, wearing a seatbelt, was held in his chair. The truck driver was still oblivious to the fact that he had hit the wheelchair. The truck picked up speed, soon reaching 50 mph. Still the wheelchair and Ben were pinned dangerously on the front.

While the driver continued along in his own little world of the truck cab, people along the road saw what was happening. Everyone seemed to see the drama unfolding but the driver. Frantic observers called 911. People waved their arms and tried to get the driver's attention. Two off-duty policemen saw what was happening and began to pursue the truck. On drove the trucker. On the road behind the truck were two new parallel lines that marked where the wheelchairs' rubber wheels were being worn off. Finally, after two terrifying miles, the driver pulled into a trucking company parking lot, still clueless to the presence of Ben Carpenter pinned to the front of his truck. Thankfully, Ben was unharmed.

The frightening picture of a many-ton truck pushing a small wheelchair can serve as a metaphor for much of the struggles we have in life. Just as a truck driver is in a big and powerful position and a person in a wheelchair is in a vulnerable position... so we have the forces of power in life... and we have vulnerable people. ...To varying degrees... powerful people have control... and vulnerable people are controlled by others.

Power is not wrong... in fact... God gives people power and authority to use for the good of others. But unfortunately... mankind is sinful... and uses power in all kinds of selfish applications.

Our passage this morning in Revelation chapter five is about the misuse of power. Tragically... the forces of power that control this world resemble this truck driver flying down the highway... with a vulnerable person pinned to the grille of their 18-wheeler. Is there anyone capable enough to stop the truck? (Today's message is titled "*Can Anyone Stop This Truck?*")

Revelation 5:1

This scroll is a mystery... Now... I know that there are some (and I myself might be one of them)... who do not like to have a good mystery spoiled... by someone who is familiar with the mystery... tell you all about it... before you have a chance to read the book or see the movie... So... **Spoiler Alert:** I am about to tell you what this scroll is. ... But wait! Actually – before you cover your ears... on the other hand - you may want to listen up... because I think it will help you understand Revelation chapter five... as we walk through the verses. It will also help you understand the rest of this Book we are studying - Revelation.

The scroll that is in the right hand of God is "The Mystery of God." It answers questions that men have been asking for generations which no one has been able to answer: Why can't we solve the great problems of mankind? ... We hear much these days of the progress that humans have made -- tremendous technological advances... the wonders that science has produced - and we pat ourselves on the back and say... "*We are right on the verge of perfection.*" ... Right now we are in the midst of a presidential race... and each candidate works very hard to create the illusion that your vote for them... is a vote to solve mankind's problems.

But when we look back on history we find that the truly great problems... the ones we wrestle with every day... are the same that men and women were wrestling with since the very dawn of time - the problem of war... of conflict between human beings... the problems of crime... evil and prejudice - these have always been with us. ... As far back in history as you can go... no one has made any advance in solving them. They are with us just as they were at the very beginning.

Why can't we get a handle on these? ... Why can't we solve such problems? ... "The chief theological question of all time" is this: "*What is going on here anyway?*"

Do you ever feel that way? ... Things happen in your life and you cannot understand them. They seem to be without meaning or reason. ... Is this world a pagan wilderness of suffering and pain... where "might" makes "right"? ... Will there ever be justice...? Will there ever be true righteousness...? Vindication for all of the evil that I see...? Mercy...?

You say with disgust... "*What is going on here anyway?*" ... "*Can Anyone Stop This Truck?*"

"What is going on here"... is the question this scroll (mentioned in Revelation 5:1) answers. And all of the other contents of Revelation chapter five answers: "Can anyone stop this truck?" ... How will God ever straighten out this mess and fulfill His promise of a golden age... when men will live in a world without war... without bloodshed... without hatred... without prejudice - when sorrow... death... and tears... have all been taken away? ... How is it to be brought about? ... Men have been dreaming of a world at peace... a utopia on earth... for centuries... but no one has found the answer.

This scroll... John says... was written both on the front and the back. The ancients seldom wrote on both sides of a scroll because one side was usually rough and uneven. ... Normally only one side was smoothed for writing. ... When both sides of a scroll were written on... it was an indication of a full and important message. This seems to indicate here that what will be unfolded as we go on... is a complex and involved account. As we will see... that is very true. The very fact that it was written is significant. It was written to indicate there is no way to change it. God has written it and there is no possibility that anyone can change it.

But if this scroll is not opened... all of the answers that are written on it will not come to pass. Hope is defeated.

The world is rapidly degenerating into a morass of wickedness and violence. The price for earth's redemption was paid long ago on Calvary's

cross... however the earth is still bound... in the tight grip of the power of the wicked one... whose truck is pushing us down the road at 55 miles per hour. Our *actual* redemption must still be accomplished.

The situation of the yet-to-be redemption... is as though a man had purchased a tract of land... and has clear title to it legally... but he is kept from occupying it... because unlawful squatters have settled on it. He first has to convince the squatters to stop their unlawful behavior. In this glorious fifth chapter of Revelation... the rightful Owner is preparing to finish the task of taking back what is rightfully His.

The description of the scroll that we see here... and the restriction of who can open its seals... is exactly like a 1st Century land deed. ... Legal documents were sealed... often with seven seals imprinted with the verifications of seven witnesses. (The wax seals would have to be broken to loose the strings beneath them... which wrapped the scroll and guaranteed that it had not been opened and thus altered.)

This form was used for contract deeds and wills; it became increasingly common in Roman documents of the period, and some Palestinian Jewish documents of this sort have been recovered. Scrolls were normally written on only one side of a papyrus sheet... reserving the outside for the title or address... but this scroll is particularly full and written on both sides. ... The writing side was called the *recto*, where the fibers were horizontal and easier for writing; the *verso* was used only when the *recto* had inadequate space. Documents written on both sides are rare enough to have a technical name - an opisthograph.

These pieces of papyrus or vellum could be as long as 30 feet. A page would be written upon... folded... signed... and then sealed with clay or wax. The writer would proceed to the next portion... fold it... sign it by a witness... and then seal it again. ... As the scroll was unfolded... (and it could only be unfolded by the rightful heir)... the seals would have to be broken on each section of the scroll.

This scroll (or title deed) reveals how the rightful heir (Who opens it) will regain His rightful inheritance. We are about to see that Christ will do this by means of divine judgments... about to be poured out upon the earth. Jesus Christ created the earth... He redeemed it... and it belongs to Him.

The opening of the scroll of God's purposes... is not just about finding someone morally good enough to do this job... but about finding the rightful heir Who has the authority to open the scroll... in the sense of putting it into effect.

The earth has been in the hands of the invader - Satan. He seized it from Adam... Today the earth is under Satan's power and influence. He is driving the truck.

Revelation 5:2-4

Never mind... for now... who is the rightful heir. ... "Who is worthy?" This seems easier than "who is the rightful heir?" ... "Who among us is capable of leading us into solutions to the problems that have been here for centuries? Who is smart enough? Who is moral enough? Who is worthy?"

Through the centuries there have been many volunteers. Nebuchadnezzar, in the Old Testament, claimed to be able to do so. He boasted of how cleverly he had built the great city of Babylon. But his empire soon fell apart.

Alexander the Great thought he had accomplished it, and at the age of 32 wept because he had no more worlds to conquer. But a few months later he drank himself to death and his empire too was gone.

Julius Caesar led the legions of Rome across the face of Europe trying to establish a world in which Roman peace (“Pax Romana”) would be prevalent. But it, too, fell ultimately to the assault of barbarians from the North.

Charlemagne in France tried to do the same thing. So did Napoleon. Hitler, thought he was establishing a thousand-year Reich that would rule the world. Yet all failed and failed dismally. Today it is ISIL.

Even the best of men among us could not do it. We revere the name of George Washington and the wisdom of our first President... but he was not able to bring about a world at peace. Even Abraham Lincoln... with his mighty heart of compassion for both North and South... was not able to solve the basic problems of humanity. Whom should we add to the list?

No wonder John wept! He wept and wept... he says... because no one could unseal the scroll or even look inside. No one knew how to go about it. None of the leaders of earth have a clue as to how to solve the issues that divide mankind and keep us from loving one another. John wept because he knew that this scroll represented the title deed to the earth and that as

long as it was left sealed... Satan will continue to squat here... and drive the truck at pell-mell speeds.

John wept bitterly. This word "wept" means a strong... unrestrained emotion. John wept because failure to find someone to complete the earth's redemption... meant that this earth (in its curse) is destined forever to death.

But then John learns that the problem is already solved.

Revelation 5:5

Jesus gives hope. Jesus wipes away tears. Jesus is mighty to save. Jesus lives! Hallelujah!

Jesus is identified here as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," which reminds us of the way Jacob blessed Judah in Genesis 49:8-12: "Judah is a lion's cub... he crouched as a lion... " (49:9). Jesus is also identified here as "the Root of David," which recalls the promise in Isaiah 11:1, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse."

This One... "the Lion of Judah" and "the Root of David" (which are titles for the Messiah)... has conquered! ... Because he has conquered... "He can open the scroll and its seven seals." ... (He can make known the end of history...He can make all God's promises come true). John has no more reason for his weeping.

You and I can take a couple of things from what we have read so far. First... let's look to Jesus when we're discouraged. There is a lot to be discouraged about in this world... but as we see all of the Bible's prophecy

being fulfilled... (and we have been looking at a lot... since we started our study in Revelation)... and because of Jesus... there's hope This world **will experience** full redemption. The rightful Owner will take re-possession. Satan's truck will come to a stop.

Second... let's be sensitive to others and encourage others with the greatness and power of Jesus. ... Let's look to Jesus when we're discouraged... and let's encourage others with the truth that Jesus has conquered. Isn't this a much better hope than politics...?! (They don't even compare.)

What do you think about when you think of victory? God has redefined victory in Christ. If you don't think of a crucified Savior... dead... buried... raised on the third day... you don't know what victory is. ... Is this victory your victory? Or are you hoping to win some other kind of victory?

One of the elders calls John to look at the Lion... but when John looks - he sees something entirely different.

Revelation 5:6

John is told to behold the Lion... Regularly in ancient literature... lions functioned as images of great strength — the courageous... powerful rulers of the animal kingdom. Jewish texts use the image of a lion for courage and power in general. ...So John turns... expecting to witness a powerful hero. Instead he sees a lamb. ... And the word that is used is in the diminutive — it literally means a little... helpless lamb. Lambs were the most vulnerable of sheep... and sheep were among the weakest of creatures.

Here is the central paradox of Revelation... and of Christian faith in general: Jesus conquered not by force - but by death... not by violence - but by martyrdom. ... The Lion is a Lamb!

But Revelation 5:6 doesn't only have the paradox of... #1. A defeat - that is really a conquest. ... It also has the paradox of... #2. A slain lamb – that is "standing" (LISTEN!) - dead things don't stand... they don't live. ... But Jesus lives!

And the paradoxes continue. Jesus is metaphorically described as a lamb... (a sacrificial animal)... but He has "seven horns."

The Bible regularly uses horns as a symbol of military might. So here is this paradoxical image of an animal of sacrifice... (a meek little lamb)... yet He is endowed with the fullness of military strength... (which is what "seven horns" signifies.)

Jesus came to earth (the first time) as a lamb. ... And He will come again as a conquering lion. ... If you do not identify with Him (today) as the sacrificial lamb... Who became the sacrifice for your sin... then you will identify with Him in defeat... when He returns as the conquering Lion.

Jesus is also described here as having "seven eyes... which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." ... This means that Jesus has the Spirit fully... and it means that He is fully apprised of all that is. Nothing escapes His notice.

Look at verse 7 and be prepared to be astonished...

Revelation 5:7

This is breathtaking audacity. We saw in verse 3... "no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it..." and yet here we just read that Jesus marches right up to the Father... seated on the throne... surrounded (as we saw in the previous chapter) by the four living creatures crying "Holy, Holy, Holy!" and in full view of the twenty-four elders... and He takes that scroll!

Crucified... dead... buried... raised... now He assertively takes the reins of history. He stops the truck! That's what this symbolizes. ... Jesus takes the scroll that describes the events of the end... whereby all the wrongs will be set right... all injustices accounted for... all crimes avenged. ... He takes it from the right hand of the Father... and the Father doesn't resist Him... the four living creatures don't object... and the twenty-four elders do not stand in His way. This symbolic action shows that Jesus will take full control of history. ... Jesus ultimately controls your destiny. He ultimately controls the destiny of every individual on the planet.

And the response to this action that begins in 5:8 and continues through the rest of the chapter should be our response: the worship of Jesus.

Revelation 5:8-14

The story continues in chapter 6 as Jesus begins to open the scroll... but let's note here why this massive worship celebration by the heavenly host and the creatures of the world is taking place: Jesus has taken control of the world's destiny. Jesus takes the scroll... and everyone bursts into celebration.

Have you contemplated the fact that Jesus is in control of the way your life will turn out? Have you thought about the fact that Jesus is in control of the way your kids' lives will turn out? ... Jesus is in control of their destiny... and we can join in this worship celebration because there is no better way for the world to be than under the control of Jesus.

The great comfort of our lives is the fact that Jesus is good... and He has taken hold of the scroll. He is in control.

And here is what makes this worship scene all the more remarkable... it is the Father's silent approval of this worship to Jesus! We don't read that the Father has any objection to the heavenly host turning their eyes upon Jesus and lavishing all this praise on Him. ... Listen to Who God says is only to receive worship like this:

Isaiah 42:8 (ESV)

I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

But the Lord allows Jesus to receive glory with Him.

This is nothing less than stunning! Jesus walks right up to the Father and lays hands on the scroll... and all Heaven responds by praising Jesus. Is there any way that John could have more clearly communicated that Jesus is very God of very God...?

In verse 8... we read that the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb. Prostration was particularly a sign of worship before gods and kings in antiquity... Jews reserved it only for God Himself. ...

Jesus has the authority to take the commission from the Father to implement His plan for the world—the plan found in the words of the scroll.

They are proclaiming the worth of the Lamb... and they are saying that He is worthy to receive anything that could be given to Him in His honor. ... He will abuse no power. ... He will misuse no wealth. ... He will do good with His power and might. ... He will respond rightly to... and is worthy of... honor and glory and blessing.

The scene here is of a kingdom of people who have recognized the great and glorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... and they bow before Him in worship. Throughout the book of Revelation there are scenarios where the curtain has been drawn back for us to peer into the realm of the eternal kingdom of God... and every time that happens... there are people... angels... and creatures worshipping Him... adoring Him... blessing Him... praising Him. ... It is the call of the people of God to be a worshipping community.

I just HAVE TO throw in a J. Vernon McGee quote here.

“My friend, I do not know why you want to go to heaven if you do not want to worship and praise Him down here.”

(LISTEN!) We deplete ourselves and our Kingdom activities... by the measure with which we fail to worship God. The picture that Revelation gives us is that people are called from every nation and tribe and tongue... to be a worshipping community!

If our church is known for anything it is probably our mission zeal. I love that about our church! ... But let me read to you what a favorite author of mine (John Piper) has written...

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When the age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever...” ... “Worship, therefore, is the fuel and the goal in missions. It is the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God’s glory.”

Everybody worships something... and it enslaves us. A very surprising source recognized this and gave a speech about it. ... American writer and intellectual - David Foster Wallace - was at the top of his profession. He was an award-winning... best-selling novelist... who committed suicide in 2008. But before his death... he gave a famous commencement address in which he said this to the graduating class:

“In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And ... pretty much anything you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never have enough Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on.”

But I say, “Worship Jesus... because He is redeeming the world.” He is about to make the truck stop !