

# CHAPTER 5

In the foregoing chapter the prophetic scene was opened, in the sight and hearing of the apostle, and he had a sight of God the Creator and ruler of the world, and the great King of the church. He saw God on the throne of glory and government, surrounded with his holy ones, and receiving their adorations. Now the counsels and decrees of God are set before the apostle, as in a book, which God held in his right hand; and this book is represented,

**I.** As sealed in the hand of God (v. 1-9).

**II.** As taken into the hand of Christ the Redeemer, to be unsealed and opened (v. 6 to the end).

## ◀▶ REVELATION 5:1-5

### THE SEALED BOOK

Hitherto the apostle had seen only the great God, the governor of all things, now,

**I.** He is favoured with a sight of the model and methods of his government, as they are all written down in a book which he holds in his hand; and this we are now to consider as shut up and sealed in the hand of God. Observe,

**1.** The designs and methods of divine Providence towards the church and the world are stated and fixed; they are resolved upon and agreed to, as that which is written in a book. The great design is laid, every part adjusted, all determined, and every thing passed into decree and made a matter of record. The original and first draught of this book is the book of God's decrees, laid up in his own cabinet, in his eternal mind: but there is a transcript of so much as was necessary to be known in the book of the scriptures in general, in the prophetic part of the scripture especially, and in this prophecy in particular.

**2.** God holds this book in his right hand, to declare the authority of the book, and his readiness and resolution to execute all the contents thereof, all the counsels and purposes therein recorded.

**3.** This book in the hand of God is shut up and sealed; it is known to none but himself, till he allows it to be opened. *Known unto God*, and to him alone, *are all his works, from the beginning of the world*; but it is his glory to conceal the matter as he pleases. The times and seasons, and their great events, he hath kept in his own hand and power.

**4.** It is *sealed with seven seals*. This tells us with what inscrutable secrecy the counsels of God are laid, how impenetrable by the eye and intellect of the creature; and also points us to seven several parts of this book of God's counsels. Each part seems to have its particular seal, and, when opened, discovers its proper events; these seven parts are not unsealed and opened at once, but successively, one scene of Providence introducing another, and explaining it, till the whole mystery of God's counsel and conduct be finished in the world.

**II.** He heard a proclamation made concerning this sealed book.

**1.** The crier was *a strong angel*; not that there are any weak ones among the angels in heaven, though there are many among the angels of the churches. This angel seems to come out, not only as a crier, but as a champion, with a challenge to any or all the creatures to try the strength of their wisdom in opening the counsels of God; and, as a champion, he cried with a loud voice, that every creature might hear.

**2.** The cry or challenge proclaimed was, "*Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?*" v. 2. If there be any creature who thinks himself sufficient either to explain or execute the counsels of God, let him stand forth, and make the attempt."

**3.** None in heaven or earth could accept the challenge and undertake the task: none *in heaven*, none of the glorious holy angels, though before the throne of God, and the ministers of his providence; they with all their wisdom cannot dive into the decrees of God: none *on earth*, no man, the wisest or the best of men, none of the magicians and soothsayers, none of the prophets of God, any further than he reveals his mind to them: *none under the earth*, none of the fallen angels, none of the spirits of men departed, though they should return to our world, can open this book.

Satan himself, with all his subtlety, cannot do it; the creatures cannot open it, nor look on it; they cannot read it. God only can do it.

**III.** He felt a great concern in himself about this matter: the apostle *wept much*; it was a great disappointment to him. By what he had seen in him who sat upon the throne, he was very desirous to see and know more of his mind and will: this desire, when not presently gratified, filled him with sorrow, and fetched many tears from his eyes. Here observe,

- 1.** Those who have seen most of God in this world are most desirous to see more; and those who have seen his glory desire to know his will.
- 2.** Good men may be too eager and too hasty to look into the mysteries of divine conduct.
- 3.** Such desires, not presently answered, turn to grief and sorrow. *Hope deferred makes the heart sick.*

**IV.** The apostle was comforted and encouraged to hope this sealed book would yet be opened. Here observe,

- 1.** Who it was that gave John the hint: *One of the elders*. God had revealed it to his church. If angels do not refuse to learn from the church, ministers should not disdain to do it. God can make his people to instruct and inform their teachers when he pleases.
- 2.** Who it was that would do the thing — the Lord Jesus Christ, called *the lion of the tribe of Judah*, according to his human nature, alluding to Jacob's prophecy (<sup>(1490)</sup>Genesis 49:10), and *the root of David* according to his divine nature, though a branch of David according to the flesh. He who is a middle person, God and man, and bears the office of Mediator between God and man, is fit and worthy to open and execute all the counsels of God towards men. And this he does in his mediatorial state and capacity, *as the root of David and the offspring of Judah*, and as the King and head of the Israel of God; and he will do it, to the consolation and joy of all his people.

## ◀636▶ REVELATION 5:6-14

### THE SEALED BOOK

Here,

**I.** The apostle beholds this book taken into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to its being unsealed and opened by him. Here Christ is described,

- 1.** By his place and station: *In the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and of the elders.* He was on the same throne with the Father; he was nearer to him than either the elders or ministers of the churches. Christ, as man and Mediator, is subordinate to God the Father, but is nearer to him than all the creatures; *for in him all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily.* The ministers stand between God and the people. Christ stands as the Mediator between God and both ministers and people.
- 2.** The form in which he appeared. Before he is called *a lion*; here he appears *as a lamb slain*. He is a lion to conquer Satan, a lamb to satisfy the justice of God. He appears with the marks of his sufferings upon him, to show that he interceded in heaven in the virtue of his satisfaction. He appears as a *lamb, having seven horns and seven eyes*, perfect power to execute all the will of God and perfect wisdom to understand it all and to do it in the most effectual manner; *for he hath the seven Spirits of God*, he has received the Holy Spirit without measure, in all perfection of light, and life, and power, by which he is able to teach and rule all parts of the earth.
- 3.** He is described by his act and deed: *He came, and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne* (v. 7), not by violence, nor by fraud, but he prevailed to do it (as v. 5), he prevailed by his merit and worthiness, he did it by authority and by the Father's appointment. God very willingly and justly put the book of his eternal counsels into the hand of Christ, and Christ as readily and gladly took it into his hand; for he delights to reveal and to do the will of his Father.

**II.** The apostle observes the universal joy and thanksgiving that filled heaven and earth upon this transaction. No sooner had Christ received this book out of the Father's hand than he received the applauses and adorations of angels and men, yea, of *every creature*. And, indeed, it is

just matter of joy to all the world to see that God does not deal with men in a way of absolute power and strict justice, but in a way of grace and mercy through the Redeemer. He governs the world, not merely as a Creator and Lawgiver, but as our God and Saviour. All the world has reason to rejoice in this. The song of praise that was offered up to the Lamb on this occasion consists of three parts, one part sung by the church, another by the church and the angels, the third by every creature.

**1.** The church begins the doxology, as being more immediately concerned in it (v. 8), the four living creatures, and *the four-and-twenty elders*, the Christian people, under their minister, lead up the chorus. Here observe,

**(1.)** The object of their worship — *the Lamb*, the Lord Jesus Christ; it is the declared will of God that all men *should honour the Son as they honour the Father*; for he has the same nature.

**(2.)** Their posture: They *fell down before him*, gave him not an inferior sort of worship, but the most profound adoration.

**(3.)** The instruments used in their adorations — *harps and vials*; the harps were the instruments of praise, the vials were full of odours or incense, which signify *the prayers of the saints*: prayer and praise should always go together.

**(4.)** The matter of their song: it was suited to the new state of the church, the gospel-state introduced by the Son of God. In this new song,

**[1.]** They acknowledge the infinite fitness and worthiness of the Lord Jesus for this great work of opening and executing the counsel and purposes of God (v. 9): *Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof*, every way sufficient for the work and deserving the honour.

**[2.]** They mention the grounds and reasons of this worthiness; and though they do not exclude the dignity of his person as God, without which he had not been sufficient for it, yet they chiefly insist upon the merit of his sufferings, which he had endured for them; these more sensibly struck their souls with thankfulness and joy. Here, *First*, They mention his suffering: *“Thou wast slain, slain as a sacrifice, thy blood was shed.”* *Secondly*, The fruits of his sufferings.

**1.** Redemption to God; Christ has redeemed his people from the bondage of sin, guilt, and Satan, redeemed them to God, set them at liberty to serve him and to enjoy him.

**2.** High exaltation: Thou *hast made us to our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth*, v. 10. Every ransomed slave is not immediately preferred to honour; he thinks it a great favour to be restored to liberty. But when the elect of God were made slaves by sin and Satan, in every nation of the world, Christ not only purchased their liberty for them, but the highest honour and preferment, *made them kings and priests* — kings, to rule over their own spirits, and to overcome the world, and the evil one; and he has made them priests, given them access to himself, and liberty to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and *they shall reign on the earth*; they shall with him judge the world at the great day.

**2.** The doxology, thus begun by the church, is carried on by the angels; they take the second part, in conjunction with the church, v. 11. They are said to be *innumerable*, and to be the attendants on the throne of God and guardians to the church; though they did not need a Saviour themselves, yet they rejoice in the redemption and salvation of sinners, and they agree with the church in acknowledging the infinite merits of the Lord Jesus as dying for sinners, that he is *worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing*.

**(1.)** He is worthy of that office and that authority which require the greatest power and wisdom, the greatest fund, all excellency, to discharge them aright; and,

**(2.)** He is worthy of all honour, and glory, and blessing, because he is sufficient for the office and faithful in it.

**3.** This doxology, thus begun by the church, and carried on by the angels, is resounded and echoed by the whole creation, v. 13. Heaven and earth ring with the high praises of the Redeemer. The whole creation fares the better for Christ. *By him all things consist*; and all the creatures, had they sense and language, would adore that great Redeemer who delivers the creature from that bondage under which it groans, through the corruption of men, and the just curse denounced by the great God upon the fall; that part which (by a prosopopoeia) is made for the whole creation is a song of *blessing, and honour, and glory, and power*,

(1.) *To him that sits on the throne*, to God as God, or to God the Father, as the first person in the Trinity and the first in the economy of our salvation; and,

(2.) *To the Lamb*, as the second person in the Godhead and the Mediator of the new covenant. Not that the worship paid to the Lamb is of another nature, an inferior worship, for the very same honour and glory are in the same words ascribed *to the Lamb and to him that sits on the throne*, their essence being the same; but, their parts in the work of our salvation being distinct they are distinctly adored. We worship and glorify one and the same God for our creation and for our redemption.

We see how the church that began the heavenly anthem, finding heaven and earth join in the concert, closes all with their *Amen*, and end as they began, with a low prostration before the eternal and everlasting God. Thus we have seen this sealed book passing with great solemnity from the hand of the Creator into the hand of the Redeemer.