

Rev 25-12-21b

We are in Revelation at the end of chapter five and the beginning of chapter six. We've taken sort of a retrospective look because as interesting and exciting as the predictive elements are of the book of Revelation and other prophetic passages in scripture, our goal is to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are made of mud, as Merle Travis saying in Nine Pound Hammer.

Some people say a man is made out of mud and we are. And to be lifted from the miry clay and have our feet set on the rock to be new life, new purpose, new emphasis people, we have to be changed. And it is the word of God that does that for us in the hands of God's Holy Spirit, who was present at creation in Genesis chapter one.

And as the spirit of God moves on the face of the chaotic waters and in subsequent verses, you have what is disorganized become organized. What is unpurposed becomes purposed. What is characterized by a lack of light and a lack of life suddenly has light and has life.

In the gospel of John chapter one, the Lord Jesus is the life and the light of men. And we've seen the correspondences between what John has written, depicting what he has seen. Write the things which you have seen.

Write the things which are, and that is where we are, which is in the age of the opportunities, the challenges, the successes and the failures that are witnessed in these letters to the seven churches. It's there for a reason. It is there for anyone who has an ear to hear, to hear what the spirit says.

You have the combination of the word and the spirit in every conclusion of all seven letters. Hear what the spirit says to the churches. The words are those of the Lord Jesus, but the spirit communicates them in manageable and understandable and helpful terms.

So we cultivate the presence of the Holy Spirit. How do we do that? We want to avoid sin. The presence of the spirit and the presence of sin are, as one might imagine, incompatible.

We will inevitably fail. We will say things we shouldn't. We will think things we shouldn't.

We will do things that we shouldn't. And we will fail to do what we should. We will fail to say what we should say.

We will fail to think thoughts that reflect the fruit of the spirit. And it is incumbent on us, we are commanded to examine ourselves and see if we are in the faith. And when we find that we are not, to do what the Lord Jesus commands these churches to do, repent, get back on track, return to the narrow road that leads to the straight gate.

This is an hour by hour, day by day mission. We are here for a purpose. We are not our own.

We are the called people of God. We were bought with a precious price. And our life matters.

You look at the great swarms of people hither and yon, it's like ants out of an anthill. And you think, does God even know I'm here? Does it matter? It absolutely matters. It is incumbent on us to recognize the opportunity that God has given us and to be overcomers.

What follows now, having been transported from what is on the earth with John at the beginning of chapter four to heaven and to see the glory of God revealed revealed in almost indescribable terms and those who surround his throne. It is so important to see this picture. The 24 elders, they represent all of the church in the same way that the Levites represented all of Israel in worship of God.

They both are representative and they are functional. These elders are representative and they are functional. They have these bowls of incense which represent the prayers of the saints.

And in this highly metaphorical and symbolic language, we have someone quote unquote lead in prayer. And it is as it functions, a representative prayer. We can represent thoughts and desires and intercessory requests on behalf of each other.

And we are representative. So these elders before the throne with their earned crowns that have been bestowed, their white robes, which represent their qualification to be representatives. You remember a couple of times in these letters to the churches, buy from me white linen garments, an overcomer promise.

These overcomers will walk with me in white. White is a symbol of overcoming, of succeeding, of being worthy to serve in the future. So we come now to these wonderful doxologies and we've seen five of them here.

There's one in chapter four, verse eight. There is a second in verse 11. There is a third in verse nine of chapter five, worthy to take the scroll addressed to the lamb.

Then in verse 12, worthy is the lamb who was slain on the part of these thousand times 10,000 and thousands of thousands, followed in verse 13, by every creation. This is representative. Once again, every single person, you don't have Satan and the fallen angels engaging in this doxology.

So what does it mean in verse 13, when it says, every creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea and all that are in them, I heard saying. This is every kind, every category. It's not every single individual.

That's just simply not logical or possible, but every kind. So every creation, so these are the raptured saints from the church age that are in heaven. These are the unfallen angels, which are in heaven.

These are the cherubim, who I think we call them angels, but I think these special entities that

surround God's throne, if they are angels, they are super angels. They are in a class by themselves, cherubim slash seraphim, when you're looking at Isaiah and Ezekiel in the Old Testament, but those who are in heaven, and this is not just the angels and not just the cherubim, it is the elders and those that they represent. You have redeemed them.

You have made them a kingdom. You have made them priests who are them. They have to be present or there's no antecedent.

They are the saints whose prayers are contained in the bowls mentioned in verse eight. Each has a harp to accompany the praise. Each has a golden bowl full of incense representing the prayers of the saints, and it is those saints who have been redeemed.

It is those saints who are represented and on whose behalf these 24 elders speak and minister. So every creation in heaven, verse 13 of chapter five, and on the earth and under the earth. Having done more work on this, I think under the earth is a fairly understandable allusion to those who are no longer present on the earth.

They have died and have fallen to the earth or are under the earth in the sense of being thought of in Hades or Sheol or the abode of the dead. It's difficult for human beings to understand how death works unless you're in the postmodern age and understand the nature of time and space and so on. And it was easy to imagine that those who are no longer walking around on the earth who have fallen to the earth, who are buried in the earth, are under the earth.

And so these are those individuals of the past, the Old Testament prophets, the Old Testament Israelites, the Old Testament patriarchs, the Old Testament pre-Diluvian guys like Methuselah and Enoch and so on. And so these who are in heaven, angelic, cherubic, church, elders and so on, they participate in this, those who are on the earth, those who are alive at this point because there are still those who are on the earth at this point. There are those who are under the earth.

These are the people of the past who have been here and the grass withers, the flower fades, and they have departed this life, but their witness, their testimony, their understanding is recorded and bears witness. And such as are in the sea, these are the ones that we don't even know about. We put markers on those whose bodies we commit to the ground in the hope of the resurrection, but those buried at sea, those who are lost at sea, those whose whereabouts are unknown, but we know that they existed in the past and nothing further is known.

I don't know the name of a single one of the 7,000 that didn't bow the knee to Baal in the days of Elijah, but God knows. But you could think of them as in the unknown, traveled, unexplored areas that only God knows. Even those participate in this testimony.

All that are in them, every classification, every category of sentient creation says, blessing and honor and glory and power be to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.

There is a witness and a testimony of appreciation that it doesn't matter when you lived, where you lived, how long you lived, when, where or how you died, whether you are still alive, whether you have been transported to glory and are already resurrected, any category of human or angelic life, all bear witness. And the four living creatures say, amen.

Notice they are not included in this listing by a separate description. They are part of those who are in heaven. The 24 elders are part of those who are in heaven.

And then there is this postlude, if you will. There is this following postscript by the four living creatures and the 24 elders who representatively, I think in the same way that there are 24 elders representing the church, I think these four living creatures are the highest and greatest and representative of all of the angelic creation. So representative function by the cherubim, representative function by the 24 elders, the faces of the cherubim and their wings are metaphoric expressions.

The crowns, the robes, the thrones and the actions of the 24 elders are representative for all of the raptured church. This brings us to chapter six. Let's read our passage.

Now I saw when the lamb opened one of the seals, I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, come and see. I would have expected that the seal itself would emit some sort of explosive sound or that there would be a trumpet or a crack of thunder. But where does the sound come from that John hears? It is one of the four living creatures.

And as is the pattern, when John has a question about what's going on in heaven, one of the 24 elders will explain it. They are from earth, they have gone to heaven and they are now explaining what they themselves understand about heaven. Now, this seal is opening that is going to initiate things on the earth and it is a living creature that is going to explain it.

He's going to say, come and see. Come and see. Why does he have to say come? Why doesn't he just say watch? Where is John? John has responded to the come up here in chapter four, verse one, in order to observe what's happening on the earth, he has to travel back as it were to witness the result of the opening of the seal.

Once again, John is a church age apostle. The elders are church age elders. Presbyteros is only ever used of elders in the church.

White robes and crowns only ever associated with church age believers. Israel doesn't wear robes and crowns. Angels don't wear robes and crowns.

Israel doesn't sit on thrones. When Jesus promises his disciples that they will sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel, it isn't because they are prophets, it's because they are apostles and that will be their future identity. Their names are gonna be on the new Jerusalem.

12 apostles, not the 12 disciples, apostles. So, come and see. And I looked and behold, a white horse.

Now, this is a result of cracking a seal on the scroll. What do we know about scrolls? Before we move forward, this particular scroll was described earlier as one that has writing inside and outside. That was verse one of chapter five.

It is in the hand of God the Father, which tells us that he is its author. The content of the scroll is the will of God. God the Father, God the creator almighty on the throne in the holy of holies of heaven.

Him who sat on the throne in his right hand, scroll written inside and on the back. Scrolls and some of the older translations say book, but these are scrolls. Books were not invented until a couple hundred years after Christ.

You don't have signatures and pages that are bound and that writing was always done on scrolls. They could be a parchment or leather. They could be papyrus.

And papyrus scrolls had a recto and a verso. They had a front and a back. And the front is the side that they concentrated on as they gathered the papyrus and they used water and pressure to create papyrus.

It is a 90 degree pattern. The front has the fibers running in one direction. The back has the fibers running in the other direction.

And the front is the smooth side. We used to look for this. If you ever do leather crafting, there's a smooth side and there's a rough side.

When they first came out with the newer boots for the Marine Corps, they called them rough side out. We used to polish our boots and spit shine them. I never quite understood spit shining boots when they're supposed to be what you wear for combat.

I don't want the glint of light shining off my highly polished boots giving me away. We've got other shoes that are supposed to look good in formation. But everybody spit shined their boots and they starched their utilities.

And it was kind of a contradiction in terms for me. You've got a field uniform, it ought to look like you're in the field. Your boots should be muddy and your utilities should be wrinkled because you're out there crawling through the landscape.

In any case, on papyrus, there is a smooth side. This is the recto, this is the front. And that is normally where things were written.

If you have a scroll that is written both on the front and on the back, it is full on the front. And rather than going to a second scroll, you turn it over and write on the back, which is the rougher side. Just by the way these are manufactured, it is a bit harder to read.

Now, think about this. I haven't heard anybody say this. This is just my practical mind.

If I'm writing, I start at the beginning and I work through to the end. So I write half of what I have to say on the smooth side and that's easy to read. By the time I get to the last part and I have to turn my scroll over and write on the back, it's gonna be harder to read in the same way that those things that are further distant in the future are more difficult to see.

We see through a glass darkly. It is more general, more nebulous, if you will, because it is further from view. And the things that God has written in terms of prophecy and the pattern of things to come, it is less clear when you start talking about the new Jerusalem and the street singular of gold and the singular tree that exists on both sides of the river and you think, well, this is, it's a city built four square.

How does that work? Is it a cube? Is it a pyramid? Why does it have a fourth dimension? This is what's written on the back of the scroll is my point. It doesn't need to be as clear because you've got to read the whole first part of the scroll first. It's written front and back.

Now the closest parallel to this, keep your finger in Revelation or put your ribbon marker there and go back to Ezekiel chapter two. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezekiel chapter two. Actually Lamentations, Ezekiel.

Son of man, stand on your feet. I will speak to you. The spirit entered me when he spoke to me and set me on my feet.

I heard him who spoke to me and he said to me, son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me. Their fathers have turned dressed against me to this very day. They are impudent and stubborn children.

Notice, Israel is related to God by birth. They are his covenant people. They are his sons and daughters.

They are his children. This is not true of any of the surrounding nations, anybody anywhere else on the earth and whatever their status, when God calls to them, he is not calling them to a new relationship. They are already related to him.

And we talk about this in general terms as believers. They are assumed to believe in God and to know that he is their covenant God and father. They are rebellious and impudent children and they are stubborn.

I am sending you to them and you shall say to them, thus says the Lord God. Isn't this what the Lord Jesus has done with John in the letters to the churches? Most of them need rebuke and correction. They have rebelled.

They have stubbornly listened to Doctrine of Balaam or the seductions of Jezebel. Old Testament examples communicating to a New Testament audience. Very interesting.

As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, Ezekiel 2.5, they will either hear or they

will refuse. He that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Do you see the pattern here in Ezekiel as it is reflected in the first chapters of the Revelation? Whether they hear or whether they refuse for they are a rebellious house, they will know that a prophet has been among them.

They will have no excuse because a messenger has come and delivered the prophetic message. You, son of man, do not be afraid of them. Do not be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions.

Do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, hear what I say to you.

He that has an ear to hear, hear. John, I heard a voice. I turned, I looked.

Hear what I say to you. You do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I give you.

When I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me and behold, a scroll of a book was in it, a scroll of a writing, a scroll of communication was in the hand. He spread it before me and there was writing on the inside and on the outside and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe. I do not see any happy blessings and felicitations and wonderful promises of the provision and so on in the cracking of these seals.

This scroll that is written on the front and on the back is very similar, if not identical, to the scroll that is seen by Ezekiel here. Moreover, he said to me, son of man, eat what you find. And we're gonna see this because this scroll is going to be seen again later in the revelation and John is going to be told to eat it.

So John in Revelation 5, verse one, I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a scroll written inside and on the back sealed with seven seals. This scroll is sealed. The one that Ezekiel sees and consumes is not said to be sealed.

Doesn't mention seals. He said to me, eat this scroll. I opened my mouth and he caused me to eat that scroll.

He said to me, son of man, this is Ezekiel 3.3, son of man, feed your belly and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you. So I ate and it was in my mouth like honey and sweetness. He said to me, son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them.

You are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, not to many people of unfamiliar speech or hard language whose words you cannot understand. Surely had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. Remember when Jesus said, oh, Chorazin and Bethsaida, if the works that have been done in you had been done in pagan areas, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes.

The house of Israel will not listen to you because they will not listen to me. Jesus says the same thing to the Pharisees and the leadership of religious Israel. You don't listen to me, you don't believe me because you didn't listen to my father and you didn't believe him.

All the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted, but I have made your face strong against their faces and your forehead strong against their foreheads like adamant stone harder than flint. I've made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, that they are a rebellious house.

Ezekiel is representative of faithful Israel, those who are faithful to do the work, the will and the word of God as John is as an apostle. So what is the pattern here? God communicates. There are hard-hearted, hard-headed, stubborn and rebellious people who are going their own way.

Ezekiel is not just handed this scroll and told to read it out like Ezra did in the days of the return to Jerusalem in Israel. He is told to do what? Eat the scroll. And it is a wonderful experience.

When he eats it, it tastes in his mouth like honey. It is sweet. Now, what do we know about this scroll? Verse 10 of the second chapter told us that it was full of lamentations and mourning and woe.

How can a scroll that depicts lamentation, mourning and woe be sweet in Ezekiel's mouth? It isn't sweet because of its effect on Israel directly. It's not a scroll of blessing and prosperity and a lamb and a olive tree for every Israelite in a peaceful land of flowing milk and honey. It's lamentation and mourning and woe.

But when Ezekiel consumes it, it is sweet in his mouth. Why? Because God is righteous and God is just and God is accomplishing this discipline and this judgment for an ultimately good beneficial purpose. And the word of God to those who love God is always sweet in the consuming, in the intake.

We appreciate it. We love it because of who gave it to us, who it is from and what it expresses in terms of his character, his love and his righteousness and justice. We appreciate that.

When the scroll appears in John's revelation, chapter four and five, there is worship and celebration, even though this is also a scroll written on the front and back full of lamentations and mourning and woe and heavy judgments. It is appreciated by those who appreciate God. It is loved by those who love God.

So the important point here is it isn't enough to read it and tell somebody else what it says. It needs to be assimilated. It needs to be taken in and have an effect to be tasted first by the messenger.

The messenger has to digest it. The messenger has to metabolize it and understand it before he goes to the audience. This is going to be reflected a bit later in the revelation.

In chapter six, verse one and following is not the time to express the aspect or the facet of this communication as in terms of its effect on the messenger because this scroll is being opened by the lamb as it had been slain. And the focus here is on the effect, what happens when the seal is opened. There is a portion of the scroll that is revealed, but this is the closest parallel is in Ezekiel chapter two and chapter three, written on the inside and the outside in both cases.

What does that suggest? It is a complete message. When the front side wouldn't contain it, it got finished on the back. It may be a little rougher, but the message is complete.

Nothing is left out and there is nothing to add. How does this apply for us? The word of God is sufficient for every need. It enables us, it guides us, it renews us, it restores us.

Washing of water by the word cleanses us. The water is turned to wine in our souls with the presence of the Holy Spirit and we have supernatural power. The power of God comes into our life by the word and by the spirit.

Even if we don't directly see, I'm studying revelation, but look at these personal challenges. Look at these relationship issues. Look at these hardships.

Look at these difficulties and challenges and things that seem intractable and insuperable and unavoidable. And I'm reading about scrolls and angels and cherubim and seals and judgments. How does that pertain to my daily life? It is the presence of the word.

The pattern is any truth of the word of God is usable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, sometimes in invisible ways. When you partake of that word, when you in effect eat the scroll, it is sweet in our mouth. Remember when Jonathan was going to fight the battle and unbeknownst to him, his father had said, "'Nobody eats anything until the battle is complete.'" And Jonathan ate honey and it strengthened him and brightened his eyes and he was able to continue.

It's energy food. It's a symbol of supernatural enablement and it is enjoyable. It is sweet.

We're going to see that there's an additional factor that comes into John's experience when he eats the scroll handed to him. But these scrolls were a record of covenant. There are many scrolls that have been recovered that are contracts or covenants between parties.

They are sometimes title deeds, just as we have this sort of thing. They are inheritance scrolls. They are a testament, a will that says what's going to happen after the death of the testator, as it says in Hebrews.

Sometimes there is a summary or an identification message on the outside of the scroll and there are terms and details and provisions on the inside, but you had to be authorized to open a scroll. Nobody could go in there and open a scroll that didn't belong to them, to which they were not party, that were not involved. It is also a written record.

And in the ancient world, this signified finality. You think of the, so let it be written, so let it be done idea in the movie, the Exodus. But you see it with Xerxes or Hasuerus in the days of Esther that once this goes out under the king's seal, it cannot be altered, it cannot be undone.

And so this is the will of God and it is without repentance. He's not going to change his mind. He's not going to say, well, I started to do this, but I'm going to rescind it.

I'm going to suspend it. I'm going to allay it and not accomplish it. It is written and it is going to be done.

It can't be amended. It can't be renegotiated. It can't be suspended.

It is written and it will be done. This means that opportunities for repentance are in the past. And we're going to see that there's no point in offering the opportunity for repentance because as these seals and trumpets and bowls judgments unfold, there is no repentance.

And there is no more repentance, only a fearful expectation of judgment, again, from Hebrews. And what humanity is going to decide, they have decided, and the consequences of those decisions and those attitudes now unfold. We're going to see in Revelation chapter 10, the open scroll, having been unsealed, is handed to John so that he can prophesy again.

And there's a message in that that is really dazzling. And we'll see that a week from today, when we resume, we're going to meet Wednesday night and have a Christmas special. But let me close with the encouragement to not only think of Revelation as prophecy and details of what is to come, but with the introduction we had in these first five chapters and chapter two and three in particular, the opportunity that we have in the present, knowing what is coming, to prepare, to be ready.

That's why this is given to us. Do we need to know what the fifth seal or the fourth trumpet or the third bowl entails? Actually we do, so that we can live a life that is pleasing to God and glorifying to the Lord Jesus now, so that we can prepare, so that we will understand and be worthy to serve and to participate and to, as the angels do, be those who are agents in accomplishing God's will and purpose now and in the future. That's why we're here.

People are looking for meaning and purpose and definition in their lives. This is it for us. It is so clear and such a wonderful, God-blessed opportunity for us.

We don't want to miss it. Even in the distractions and earthly appeals and seductions that are represented with Balaam and Jezebel and other things, we want to eat the manna. We want to partake of what is in the scroll, not food offered to idols.

Getting caught up in what the news says and what the opinion makers and the influencers have to say and what the interpretations are of events near and far in the news, this is what makes us. This is what defines us. This is what energizes us.

This is what enables us to fulfill potential now and in the age to come. We do not want to be hard-headed and hard-hearted like Ezekiel's audience. We hope that those in the church responded to the words that the Lord Jesus sent them via John that we've seen in these two central chapters in this first introduction.

Well, so much to think about. So exciting as we move forward to see how this will affect the way we think and the way we act and what we can be preparing for and practicing for now so that when it unfolds, we, as part of the white-robed throng, will participate and be qualified to reign on the earth and to reflect with our white robes and our golden crowns the righteousness of God and the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we thank you for the truth of your word.

We thank you for how powerful it is to lift us up from what is mundane and transient and ephemeral, the vanity that Solomon wrote about, and to enter into eternal life even now as we await our transformation, as we rate our union with Christ in the sky and in the heavens and in the future. Even now, we can begin to partake of the hidden manna. We can begin to avail ourselves of the power and the grace and the glory that is reflected in the saving work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

We pray that we can be those who not only practice what we learn, but shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation so that others can see the Lord Jesus and be drawn to that light. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.