

Revelation: A Call to Faithful Witness

Class 2, "Our Father Who Art in Heaven . . ."

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Isaac Gould

Setting: The Roman Public Story

- Divine imperial destiny
 - Zeus promised that the descendants of Aeneas would "rule the sea and all the lands about it" (*Aeneid* 1.236–37).
 - *Orbis terrarum* – the civilized world destined for Roman rule
 - Marcus Agrippa's world map (reconstruction) – AD 20, developed during Augustus's consolidation of power while fighting Marc Antony
 - This was the whole world that mattered, and it was the destiny of Rome
 - Roma – the divinization of Roman order
 - End of civil strife
 - Protection from invasion
 - Improvement in travel
 - Safety from brigands and pirates
 - Increase in trade
 - Disaster relief
 - Rule of law
 - Water supply
 - Entertainment
 - Providence
 - "Since Providence . . . has set all things in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a **savior**, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things well, and because he, Caesar, by his **appearing**, . . . surpassed all previous benefactors and leaves posterity no hope of another surpassing what he has done, and because the birthday of the **god** Augustus was the beginning of the **good news** for the world that came by reason of him" (Priene Calendar inscription, 9 BC)
 - Imperial cult
 - Temples, shrines, altars, cult images of Augustus, family, and successors
 - 35 Asian cities called νεωκόροι, "temple wardens," including all seven of Revelation's addressees.
 - Pergamum built temple to Augustus and Roma in 29 BC, first called νεωκόροι (competed with Ephesus over title)
 - Imperial altars, subsidized priesthoods in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis
 - **Locally motivated, source of civic pride** – like competition over having a football team or landing the Olympics in one's town

The True Center (Revelation 4–5)

- The focal point of the cosmos is not the Roman empire or the USA, where you go about your daily business, where influential people exert influence and powerful people use power, but the throne.
- Narrative commences (recall that apocalyptic has a narrative framework)
 - The narrative is organized around "what must take place after this," what appears a simple look toward the future.

- As we shall see, however, between now and the accomplishment of the future revealed in Revelation lies a great deal of upheaval and conflict.

- **The Throne**

- OT background (“a symphony of OT theophanies”)
 - Isaiah 6
 - Daniel 7
 - Ezekiel 1
 - Burning bush, Sinai, 1 Kings 22:19
- Beauty and radiance – That’s as close as we get to seeing God described; cf. Ezek 1:28, “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD”
- Surrounded by exalted worshipers
 - Their activity is more important than their identity
 - Probably 12 tribes + 12 apostles
 - Purity, victory, worship
- Theophanic glory (judgment foreshadowed)
 - Lightning, earthquake, and thunder are signs accompanying God’s arrival on earth.
 - The fact that they come from the throne of God suggests that they proceed from God Himself, and are an extension of His very being. Yes, God is not the author of evil, but judgment is not something foreign to God’s character as something that overtakes Him as He gets angry. **Judgment emanates from His throne. His glory is a terrifying thing and He thunders and lightnings in the revelation of His glory.** If He keeps His glory from us, it is to keep from consuming us, as at Sinai. Yet He desires to be with us, so we must be made of the right stuff, so we are not consumed by the expression of His glory. This is the purpose of redemption.
- A world undisturbed, sovereignty uncontested
 - The sea is never still, a constantly roiling image of chaos.
- God is praised AS CREATOR
 - We are so utilitarian that we honor the created thing over the creator: the value and usefulness of a thing outweighs the genius of its creator.
 - The very existence of the physical universe is sufficient cause for God’s being praised eternally.

- **The Scroll**

- Contains “what must take place after this” (4:1), i.e., the final achievement of God’s kingdom
 - The following narrative demonstrates that authority to open the scroll translates into authority to get the ball rolling for final judgment, at which point “the kingdoms of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (11:15).
- No one can open it = Something forbids the accomplishment of eschatological salvation
 - Hence the weeping
 - Ever since Adam, mankind has been characterized by failure after failure. No one is able to bring the kingdom that everyone wants to see.
- The arrival of the Messianic Conqueror
 - The imagery is clearly Messianic, emphasizing authority to rule and deliver God’s people.
 - The reader expects the unveiling of Jesus in his divine glory, as at the Transfiguration or in Rev. 1.
 - This is what is HEARD.

- **The Lamb**

- Contains “what must take place after this” (4:1), i.e., the final achievement of God’s kingdom
- Slaughtered
- 7 horns, 7 eyes
- Worshiped
- Ironic conquest
 - Rather than killing his enemies, he dies for them.
 - The messianic titles evoke strong militaristic and nationalistic images—David the conqueror of the nations, destroying the enemies of God. But what John sees is a sacrifice that redeems the nations.
 - A remarkable part of this vision is that the risen Christ is presented here still as a lamb, and he still bears the signs of his slaughter. His identity and life experience of suffering remains a part of who he is even as resurrected. In the context of godforsakenness and suffering, it is a great comfort to know that Jesus’ sufferings are a permanent part of who he is.
- What does heaven value more than anything?
 - God rules through the self-giving of his Son
 - Jesus’ death discloses the true meaning of power, judgment, and salvation

Summary: The Lord’s Prayer