

"Thank God for What He's Done"

Revelation 5

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

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Last week you and I looked at one of the prayers in the Book of Revelation, the Great Prayer in Revelation 4 that gives thanks to God for who He is. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come."

And I don't know whether or not you took me up on my invitation to you and included the prayer of Revelation 4 in your own prayers this week. But I hope you did. Because every time I challenge myself to pray the prayer of Revelation 4 more frequently in my life, I discover something. The prayer transports me. It transports me from where I am into the presence of God.

And not only does the prayer transport me. When I say it, it transforms me. For as I say the prayer it reminds me of almost everything I need to remember about God. He is holy, perfect in every way that defines good for us. He is powerful, able not only to know what's good, but to do it if it's His will. And He is perpetual, the same today as He was yesterday, the same tomorrow as He is today.

And I find that those three truths about who God is transform me. They transform me as I say them out loud. They transform the way I think about God. And I never get tired of repeating them. I hope you don't either. And I hope that during this week you've been repeating them and reminding yourself what a precious experience, what a spiritually precious experience it is to pray the prayer of Revelation 4 regularly, to use it as part of your conversation with God.

But this morning, I want to talk with you about another prayer that I believe needs to be a part of our regular conversation with God right alongside the prayer in Revelation 4. It's different than the prayer of Revelation 4 because it's not intended to help us thank God for who He is. It's meant instead to help us thank God for what He's done. It's the Great Prayer of Revelation 5. And as we begin to look at it, let me tell you a story.

The story I want to tell you is a true story. It was first reported by *The Washington Post* in a copyrighted article that appeared last fall, September of 2009. The story began with these words. "The king folds her own laundry, chauffeurs herself around Washington in a 1992 Honda, and answers her own

phone. Actually she answers her boss's phone, too."

The story was about a woman. Her name is Peggienelene Bartels. And she was and still is a secretary in the Embassy of Ghana. She's a longtime employee there. She's worked there for more than 30 years. But she was born in Ghana, in the city of Otuam. It's a city of about 7,000 people and it's governed by a king.

But last summer, the 90-year-old king died. And the elders of Otuam did what they've always done. They performed a ritual to choose a new king. They prayed and poured a drink out on the ground. And as it is the names of the dead king's known relatives are read aloud. When steam rises from the ground, the person's name being read at that moment is declared Otuam's new king.

So last September that's what happened. The prayers were prayed. The cup containing the drink was poured out on the ground. The reading of the names began and the name that was being read when steam began to rise from the ground was the name of Peggienelene.

So now she's a king—yes, a *king*, and not a queen (when she pointed out to the elders that she was a woman, they replied by saying the office of king was the post that was open when they prayed). So now when Peggienelene travels back to Ghana, she has a driver, a chef and an eight-bedroom palace that needs some repairs. She has power to rule over a kingdom of just over 1,000 acres and pronounce judgments over the people who live on that land. In an interview she told a reporter, "It's true, you know. I'm a big time king now. "

And she is. But the truth is, the verdict on whether or not she's a big time king is still out. She hasn't done much. Not yet. She hasn't shown the people of Otuam if she's a worthy King. But there is someone, someone else who's worthy to be Otuam's King and ours, worthy to rule over the whole world and worthy to pronounce judgments over its peoples. His name is Jesus.

"Then I saw a lamb," John says, "looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center before the throne by the four living creatures and the elders."

And maybe John sees Jesus not as a lamb and not as a human being because of the way his ministry began beside the Jordan river when John the Baptist saw him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." Or maybe John sees Jesus as a lamb because of the way his ministry ended. For he died on the cross, John says, at the same time the Passover lambs were slain in the temple.

But for whatever reason, there he is, in John's vision, Jesus Christ, the lamb of God. "And He went," John says, "He went and took the scroll," the scroll that in the next few chapters of Revelation will bring God's judgment upon the earth. But as he took the scroll in his hands, John says, a new prayer began to be prayed in heaven, addressed this time not to God the Father, but to God the Son.

"Worthy, worthy ... you are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God, members of every tribe and language and people and nation."

It's the Great Prayer of Revelation 5. And I wonder if the people of Otuam know the prayer? I wonder if they know that beyond the king they've chosen to rule their village and give judgments to them for the next few decades stands a King who's been chosen to rule the earth and give final judgment to all its peoples?

The Lamb of God whose ministry started at the Jordan river and ended on the cross is the one God has chosen to take the scroll from His hand, to rule with his authority over the Otuam and you and me. And the reason God has made His choice is not because a cup was poured out on the ground and steam began to rise when Jesus' name was read. No, the reason God made His choice is because of what the Lamb of God has done.

It's what He's done that's made Him worthy of God's choice. And what He's done is to purchase us, to redeem us so that we can be His people, all of us; people from every tribe and language and people and nation, a kingdom together to serve our God. Jesus has redeemed us to be those people, to be that kingdom. And of course when I say the word redeemed I probably ought to go on and explain what it means. So let me see if I can do that for you. Let me tell you another story.

In 2003, a journalist named David Hajdu who's the music critic for *The New Republic Magazine* told a story in an article he wrote about Wynton Marsalis, probably the greatest jazz trumpeter of the last few decades. In the story Hadju told about going one night to a New York basement club to hear Marsalis play with a relatively unknown combo.

A few songs into the last set, Marsalis walked to the front of the stage. He started a solo version of an old song from the 1930's. The song's called "I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance with You." From the moment he started playing the audience was entranced. Wynton Marsalis' trumpet wept with despair. It gasped at times with pain. He came to the final phrase of the song with each note coming slower and slower. "I...don't...stand...a ghost...of a

chance ..."

Then someone's cell phone went off. It started to play a silly little song and someone in the audience started to laugh. The man with the phone jumped up. He went out in the hallway to take the call. The musical spell was broken. And David Hajdu began to scratch two words in his notes "Magic ruined!

But then he looked up. Wynton Marsalis was playing the cell phone song. He was playing it on his trumpet, note for note. He played it again, with different accents. He played it again, spinning out variations on the tune. The audience settled back down. They knew they were hearing something really special. Around and around Marsalis played for several minutes, weaving goofy into glory.

And then at last, with a masterstroke, he wound the variations on the cell song theme down seamlessly into the last two notes of the song he'd been playing when the phone went off: "...with...you." And as the song ended, David Hadju scratched out the word "ruined" on his notepad and wrote the word, "redeemed." Magic redeemed!

And in the same way that the grace and talent of Wynton Marsalis redeemed that broken song in a jazz club in New York city, the grace of Jesus Christ has redeemed the broken melody of my life with God and yours. He has taken the disruptive, discordant disharmony created by sin in our lives. He has taken it into His body and absorbed it and turned it into a new harmony that blends together both God's justice and God's love.

And because He has done this, the Lamb of God deserves our gratitude. At the end of the song Wynton Marsalis played in a New York jazz club that night, the whole audience, including the man whose cell phone had gone off gave him a standing ovation. It went on and on. And according to Revelation 5 we're meant to do something very similar. We're meant to learn the prayer that celebrates what God has done for us in Christ and pray it over and over.

Who knows? Maybe you'll even write a tune for it. Maybe you'll turn into a song or a even chorus. Don't laugh! It's been done by hundreds of Christians over the years, famous composers like Bach and Handel and less famous composers, just ordinary Christians who've made up their own melody. But whether you say it or sing it, my advice to you is learn it. Learn the Great Prayer of Redemption in Revelation 5 and learn how to pray it because this song is your song.

Someone once observed very wisely that there is not one prayer or song in the

Book of Revelation that is said to be a solo. All of the Great Prayer Songs of the Book of Revelation are sung by a chorus. Let me invite you. Join the chorus this week. Spend this week like last week, learning to pray one of the prayers of heaven. Pray the prayer of Revelation 5 and let it transport and transform you.

Let's pray ...