

26. The Book of Revelation—5:1

(12/2/20)

Last time we were in Revelation—we got as far as verse 1 of chapter 5:

Revelation 5:1 (NKJV)

¹ And 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.

As John was raptured to heaven at the beginning of chapter 4—he began to describe what he saw (as we studied in chapter 4).

And now in chapter 5, as John looks at God the Father on His throne—he notices something in the Father’s **right hand**.

As John looks more closely, he sees that the Father has in His right hand—a **scroll**.

As we said last time—scrolls in John’s day were usually made of eight-by-ten-inch sheets of papyrus which were connected horizontally and wound around wooden handles rolled from both ends into the middle.

The Greek word for ‘**scroll**’ is *biblion*—the same word we get the word ‘Bible’ from—which in Greek means ‘book’.

However, John is describing a *scroll* not a book as we would think of one—such scrolls were commonly used before the invention of modern-style books.

As I said, papyrus sheets for writing were made from the inside of the papyrus reed. (Explain)

Due to the coarse back of the papyrus—usually only the smooth side was used to write on—however, here we see a scroll written on *both* sides and sealed with seven seals.

From what I understand, only really important documents were written on both sides—like wills and deeds.

And while Roman *wills* by law had to be sealed with seven seals—I believe this scroll is not a *will*, but a deed.

Jeremiah 32:6-15 provides a good illustration of the use of such a deed document. (Comment)

Let me stop here and give you some important background information.

Land in Israel was never really *sold* because it belonged to the Lord—“*The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness.*” (Ps.24:1)

If you couldn’t pay off your debt you could “sell” your land to your creditor—but it was really only a *lease* agreement and it would by law contain a *redemption clause* so that if you came into some money you could redeem it back.

If you had a blood relative (a ‘kinsman’ Hebrew- *goel*) that had the resources—they could redeem it for you (pay off your debt) and the property would once again become yours to use.

If not, every fiftieth year in Israel was the ‘Year of Jubilee.’”

In the Year of Jubilee 3 things happened—

1. *All debts were canceled.*
2. *All slaves went free (if a Jew had to ‘sell’ himself into slavery to pay off his debt).*
3. *And all lands returned to their original owners.*

This was such an important element in Jewish culture and law (the law of redemption) that God had one whole book in the Old Testament written about it—the Book of Ruth.

The Book of Ruth is the story of the kinsman redeemer named *Boaz* (a type of Christ) who redeemed a piece of land for *Naomi* (a type of the nation of Israel) and in the process married Ruth, a Gentle bride who is a type of the Church.

What is the scroll in the Father’s right hand?—I believe that this scroll is the “**title deed**” to the earth—

One scholar agrees with this interpretation and adds this:

“The scroll John saw in God’s hand is the title deed to the earth, which He will give to Christ. Unlike other such deeds, however, it does not record the descriptive detail of what Christ will inherit, but rather how He will regain His rightful inheritance. He will do so by means of the divine judgments about to be poured out on the earth (6:1ff.). While the scroll is a scroll of doom and judgment, it is also a scroll of redemption. It tells how Christ will redeem the world from the usurper, Satan, and those men and demons who have collaborated with him. Ezekiel describes this same scroll in his vision of heaven: *‘Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe’*” (Ezek. 2:9–10).”

Again, let me stop and give some background information that will help us to understand what is going on here.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth—the earth was the Lord’s and the fullness thereof (it belonged to God by virtue of Divine creation—He made it and it belonged to Him).

But God then gave the earth to *man* (mr. and mrs. ‘man’, *mankind*—Adam and Eve), when He created them and placed them in the Garden of Eden.

At that time, God told them they were to have *dominion* over the earth as its *caretakers* (Gen.1:27-28)—in other words, they were to take care of it and treasure it as a beautiful gift from God.

But then Satan took the form of a serpent, and tempted Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—the tree God had forbidden them to eat from—lest they die.

Eve was fooled by Satan’s deception (promising her ‘godhood’) and ate the fruit, and then she gave some to Adam and he also ate—and immediately they died (spiritually—but it set in motion the process of physical death as well—the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics—entropy) and their fellowship with God was broken.

What they probably didn’t understand was that, in eating the forbidden fruit not only was their fellowship with God severed—they transferred ownership of the earth (and all that it contained) into the hands of Satan.

In the wilderness when Satan tempted Jesus 3 times—with regard to the third temptation we read:

Matthew 4:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, '*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.*' "

You’ll notice that when Satan said in verse 9, “*All these things I will give You* (implying ownership) *if You will fall down and worship me*”—

Jesus didn’t challenge or contest that statement by the devil because He knew it was true (it had to be if Satan could use it to ‘tempt’ Christ).

And so, the earth, which God had given to them, they now turned over to Satan—and he became earth’s new owner and man’s new master.

And Satan has control over the world to this day.

In 2Corinthians 4:4 Paul called Satan “*the god of this world*”—and it is Satan who has introduced into this world all of the evil, pain, heartache, sickness, and injustice we see going on around us (and getting worse by the day).

And he was the reason the people to whom John was writing were watching their brothers and sisters incarcerated or fed to the lions, crucified, or dipped in hot pitch (tar) or wax etc.

Jesus in chapter 1 told John to write down the things that became the Book of Revelation so the people of God in the Church Age and beyond would know what was coming in the future.

But also, this book was written in part to deal with the sufferings of the present—questions that John’s sheep and other congregations going thru great persecutions (then and down thru the centuries) have wrestled with as well:

“If God is all-powerful and all-good—why is there evil in the world? Why are there wars, cancer, floods, child-trafficking, depression, rape, murder and injustice? Doesn’t this prove that God isn’t an all-good, all-powerful God—or even that He doesn’t exist at all?”

Apologist and author Norm Geisler wrote,

“The most powerful argument ever devised against the existence of God is this: ‘If an all-powerful God exists who created the universe, and if He is all-good who put morality into the heart of man to show us that He is a good and moral God—then why does evil exist in the world? If God is all-good so that He would eliminate evil; and if He is all-powerful so that He could eliminate evil, yet evil is not eliminated therefore—an all-good, all-powerful God cannot exist. He could be partly good and partly powerful but He can’t be both, because if He was all-good He would eliminate evil; if He was all-powerful He could eliminate evil and since evil has not been eliminated no such God exists.’”

Please indulge me for the remainder of our time tonight because even though this deviates from our study—it becomes the foundation that the whole Book of Revelation is built upon—

"If God is good, why is there evil in the world and why doesn't He do something about it?"

As I said, many Christians have wrestled with this 'dilemma' for centuries (usually during times of great persecution against the people of God)—but during the same period of time atheists and skeptics have used this argument as their primary weapon against the existence of God.

Norm Geisler goes on to say that for the atheist and skeptic *they* believe that this is an airtight argument against the existence of an all-good, all-powerful God—

"If God is all-good so that He would eliminate evil; and if He is all-powerful so that He could eliminate evil → yet evil is not eliminated therefore an all-good, all-powerful God cannot exist."

But the problem with that argument is that it is built on a faulty assumption—that just because evil hasn't been eliminated YET—it never will be!

Norm Geisler—

"If the atheist phrased the argument correctly it wouldn't prove his point. If he said, "If there is an all-good God who would eliminate evil; and an all-powerful God who could eliminate evil and since He hasn't yet eliminated evil—He can't exist."

If the question was phrased like that, our response would be—*"Just because evil hasn't been eliminated yet —doesn't mean it won't be eliminated someday."*

If the atheist could say with all certainty—*"If God is all-good He would; if He is all-powerful He could, evil has not yet been eliminated and it never will be therefore no such God exists"*—now he's got a good argument against the existence of an all-good and all-powerful God.

However, the only way anyone could make a statement like that would be for them to know the future—and only God knows the future.

The Book of Revelation tells us that one day God *will* settle all accounts and eliminate all evil.

Criticizing God for not doing it right now is like reading half a novel and criticizing the author for not resolving the plot.

The atheist would then argue, “*If God is all-good and all-powerful and He made everything then where did evil come from—God must have created evil which means He can’t be all-good or evil would not exist.*”

This argument goes back at least as far as Augustine—

Augustine in 400 A.D. said, “*To say God created everything, evil is something, therefore God created evil, is to miss the real nature of evil. God is the author of everything, we accept that premise, but evil is not ‘a thing,’ it is a lack in a thing, hence it does not follow that God is the author of evil.*”

Dr. Norm Geisler elaborates—“*Evil is a privation or a lack. Evil is like rust to a car or rot to a tree. It’s a kind of parasite; it exists only in something else. The Bible teaches that a good God created a good universe but gave man a good thing called free will, which allowed for the possibility for evil to enter God’s universe and corrupt it.*”

God made evil possible by giving us a good thing called ‘free will’—just like Henry Ford made every automobile accident in America possible, along with the pain, suffering and fatalities they have caused.

Are cars then evil along with the man who invented them simply because the people driving those cars haven’t always acted responsibly behind the wheel?

Even so, the Bible teaches that this world is not the world God originally created for us to live in—man (Adam) messed it up thru sin.

“Did God know we were going to sin before He made us?” Yes—

Revelation 13:8 (NKJV)

⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

“If God knew before He ever created us that we were going to blow it—why did He let us—why didn’t He stop us?”

You mean force us? That would remove our free will and turn us into robots—and God didn’t want robots (automatons).

He wanted people who of their own free will would love Him and obey Him.

True love cannot exist unless freely given through free will and choice—“*Forced love is rape, and God is not a divine rapist.*” (Norm Geisler)

He goes on to say—

“The classic defense of God against the problem of evil is that it’s not logically possible to have free will and no possibility of moral evil. In other words, once God chose to create human beings with free will, then it was up to them, rather than to God, as to whether there was sin or not. That’s what ‘free will’ means. Built into the situation of God deciding to create human beings is the chance of evil and, consequently, the suffering that results.”

The skeptic cries, “*Aha! Then God is the creator of evil!*”

Lee Strobel, *A Case For Faith* —

“No, He created the possibility of evil; people actualized that potentiality. The source of evil is not God’s power but mankind’s freedom. Even an all-powerful God could not have created a world in which people had genuine freedom and yet there was no potentiality for sin, because our freedom includes the possibility of sin within its own meaning. It’s a self-contradiction—a meaningless nothing—to have a world where there’s real choice while at the same time no possibility of choosing evil. To ask why God didn’t create such a world is like asking why God didn’t create colorless color or round squares.”

“If He knew we’d bring so much evil and heartache into the world—why did He even bother to create us in the first place?”

Because God is love and wanted to share that love with us even though He knew it would be ‘messy’, and that there would be problems (many) between creation and culmination (heaven).

Someone has said, *“The only way to get to the Promised Land was through the wilderness. The only way to form diamonds is to put pressure on coal. The only way to produce first order good is to allow second order evil. If you never allow evil, you’ll never be able to defeat it. If you don’t allow sin, you’ll never have the higher good of forgiveness. If you don’t allow tribulation, you’ll never produce patience. God permits evil, but He does not promote evil.”*

“Yes, but evil is bad—if God is good why doesn’t He protect us from it?”

First of all, whatever evil is in the world came through man (Romans 5:12-14), and now that man has exercised his free will in rebellion against God and has brought all these negative consequences upon the human race—God is using the consequences of our sin and rebellion to break people and bring them to Christ—

C.S. Lewis said in, *The Problem Of Pain*,
“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It is His megaphone to arouse a (morally) deaf world.”

But also to develop His children (sanctification) and make them more and more into the image of Jesus (2Cor. 3:18).

Romans 5:3-4 (NKJV)

³ And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

James 1:2-4 (NKJV)

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Norm Geisler—

“This is not the best of all possible worlds, but I think it’s the best of all possible ways to get to the best of all possible worlds. A true believer is something like tea, their real strength comes out in hot water. God permits suffering to produce the greatest virtues in us. Job said, *‘When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.’*”

And so, God allows pain to bring about the greater good.

One author—

“Every athlete, especially an Olympic athlete, goes through incredible pain and suffering in training—why? For the joy and glory of victory! If victory wasn’t greater than the suffering it takes to get there, no one would ever endure it—so every athlete endures pain to bring about the greater good.”

But secondly, for the people who can’t understand why, even if man messed up this world, God doesn’t just ‘fix it’ and make it problem free again.

They are harboring under a faulty assumption—that the absence of all suffering would be the greatest good for mankind.

Or to put it another way—they feel a God of love *would* never and *could* never use suffering or pain for our good and His glory.

But is it possible that God could use suffering and tragedy to teach us important lessons that help us grow as believers while drawing us to God in a way that nothing else would?

In other words—can God use for good what Satan intended for evil?

The answer is ‘yes’—He has already.

God has already demonstrated how the very worst thing that has ever happened in the history of the world ended up resulting in the very best thing that has ever happened in the history of the world—the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. (Explain)

Don't forget that the God who said, *"The soul that sins shall surely die"*— is also the same God who said, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life."*

When it comes to suffering on account of sin—God took His own medicine by becoming one of us and suffered more than any of us ever would if we lived a million lifetimes.

One author said,

"How could you not love this Being Who went the extra mile, Who practiced more than He preached. Who entered into our world, Who suffered our pains, Who offers Himself to us in the midst of our sorrows? What more could He do?"

John Stott—

"I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross...In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in light of His. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross which symbolizes divine suffering. The cross of Christ...is God's only self-justification in such a world as ours."

"I'm still having a problem understanding why a good God permits so much evil in this world, and why some Christians die young and evil people live long?"

J.B. Phillips—*"If God were small enough to figure out, He wouldn't be big enough to worship."*

Deuteronomy 29:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ "The secret *things belong* to the LORD our God, but those *things which are revealed belong* to us and to our children forever...

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD.

⁹ "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Sometimes God will call upon His people to suffer for His glory and even to have loved ones taken from us too soon—at those times we need to trust Him all keep ‘looking up’—

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NLT2)

¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

“Why doesn't God put an end to evil and suffering?”

He intends to (that's what the Book of Revelation is all about!)—but right now He's giving people the option (to exercise their free will)—to choose earth (this present fallen world system of sin and rebellion) or living in His kingdom, a new world where there will be no injustice, evil, or suffering.

Just like He gave Adam and Eve a choice to live in paradise, but they rejected God's offer and chose to rebel, He's now offering everyone else the same choice!

To live in God's Kingdom, you have to bow to Jesus as your King—Now!

C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce* said,

“In the end the world will be made up of two groups of people, those who have said to God ‘Your will be done.’ And those to whom God will say, ‘Your will be done.’”