

## A Theology of the Book of Revelation

### *Session #4 – Christology in the Book of Revelation (Continued)*

#### Review

Last week, we considered the person and work of Jesus as portrayed in the book of Revelation. We noted that the study of the person and work of Jesus is the study of Christology, so technically, we are considering the Christology of the book of Revelation. The conclusion that we made last week was that Jesus is to be understood as God in the book of Revelation. He is “the first and the last” and the One who is worthy of worship as the offspring of David who fulfills God’s promises to the people of Israel. As the offspring of David, Jesus wages the Messianic War. In the past, the Israelites failed to properly understand God’s prophecies regarding the fulfillment of His promises to David. They believed that Messiah would be like David in every respect and free the people from physical and political oppression. However, while the Messiah would eventually make all things right in the physical and political realms, the Messiah came to free people from their spiritual bondage to sin and Satan. By doing so, Jesus began to usher in the kingdom of God or, as Revelation puts it, “to turn the kingdom of the world into the Kingdom of our Lord and His Messiah” (11:15).

As the offspring of Jesse, Jesus comes bearing the Messianic sword from His mouth (Rev. 1:16, Cf. Isa. 11:4b). And Jesus bore the sword in righteousness and justice (Rev. 19:11, Cf. Isa. 11:3-4). As Jesus fulfills this work, he receives the nations as an inheritance from His Father (Rev. 2:26-27, Cf. Psa. 2:8). The key point being that the book of Revelation reveals Jesus as the One who fulfills these Old Testament Messianic expectations. There was no need for the Jews to look elsewhere. The King had come and the Messianic War had begun in Christ. Victory was certain for those who trusted in Christ. The question that remained was simple: Would the people trust in Jesus?

This brings us to the second major theme in the book of Revelation as it pertains to the person and work of Christ, and that is – Jesus is the leader of the eschatological exodus.

#### The Eschatological Exodus

The single greatest image of redemption in the Old Testament is the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage. In the first Exodus, God judged the enemies of His people while also freeing them from bondage. So let me ask – in the first Exodus, what is the decisive act that leads to the freedom of the people of Israel? It is the Passover, and what is central to the imagery of the Jewish Passover? The slaying of the Passover Lamb. Now, let me ask you, do we find the imagery of a slain lamb anywhere in the book of Revelation? Yes! We find it in the heavenly worship scene in Rev. 5:6, 9-10, where Christ is portrayed as a Lamb slain, but now reigning! The vision that God is giving us, then, in the book of Revelation, is one of the final Exodus of God’s people from bondage to sin and Satan by virtue of the work of the Lamb of God slain for the world (See Isa. 53:7).

Is there more imagery in the book of Revelation that suggests that God was revealing the work of Christ as a new, eschatological exodus from bondage? I believe Rev. 15:2-4 clearly evokes images that refer to Christ’s work in redeeming His people from bondage to sin and Satan. Just

look at how Rev. 15:2-4 refers not only to the people of God (specifically, martyrs) but also a sea and the song of Moses...

### **Revelation 15:2-4**

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,  
    O Lord God the Almighty!  
Just and true are your ways,  
    O King of the nations!  
Who will not fear, O Lord,  
    and glorify your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
    All nations will come  
    and worship you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

If you continue to consider Revelation 15, you will also find that the plagues that fall on God’s enemies are modeled off of the plagues that fell on the Egyptians. Furthermore, when Christ rebukes the false prophets in the church at Pergamum, He does so by comparing them to Balaam, “the false prophet who was responsible for the seduction of the Israelites into idolatry, as a result of which they failed to reach the goal of the exodus: entry into the promised land.”<sup>1</sup>

The imagery of the Exodus is used to highlight the definitive nature of Christ’s work on behalf of His people. As Richard Bauckham wrote, “As with the messianic war, John’s use of the new exodus imagery shows that for him the decisive eschatological event has already occurred: the new Passover Lamb has been slaughtered and he has ransomed a people for God. The goal of the new exodus is still to be attained, when Christ’s people will reign with him as priests on earth (20:4-6, 22:3-5), attaining their theocratic independence in the promised land.” The polemic, then, of the imagery is to show that Christ has, in one sense, already conquered. The people of God have already been set free. There is, therefore, no reason to return to the slavery of sin and Satan. For freedom, He has set us free, and if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed (John 8:36). As a final theme of consideration, we see the work of Christ characterized as that of the “faithful and true witness...”

### **Witness**

Again, Richard Bauckham is insightful, explaining, “The title (witness) refers primarily to the witness which Jesus bore to God during his life on earth and to his faithfulness in maintaining his witness even at the cost of his life.” While the term “Martyr” did not yet have the formal meaning that it has now (one who dies for their faith or because of their faith), the term

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<sup>1</sup> Bauckham 73

“witness,” which is a translation of the Greek term, *martys*, implied that those who witness to the truth would incur opposition that would eventually lead to death.

Jesus is the first of such witness in the New Covenant, but he is not the last. Jesus’ followers continue in this work of bearing witness to the truth and being willing to die for the sake of their faithfulness to Christ. So what is the nature of this witness? “It is primarily Jesus’ and his followers’ witness to the true God and his righteousness, which exposes the falsehood of idolatry and the evil of those who worship the beast.” So, as it stands currently in the world, there are essentially two positions – one that advocates for the truthfulness of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ and all the others who advocate for what is false. It is as if we are witnesses in a courtroom bearing witness to the truth about God against the error spread by the world. While the world seeks to intimidate the witness, the book of Revelation upholds Jesus as the example of the faithful One who witnesses to the truth about God and opposes idolatry, even to the point of death. We, as followers of Jesus, look to Him as our example and our strength in remaining faithful, even in the face of death, as we witness to the truth of God’s Word while opposing all idolatry.

So here is the thing about Jesus as the Witness and his followers as those who continue as Witnesses - When the enemy puts these witnesses to death for their faithfulness, who would the world say was victorious? The enemy, right? When the enemy puts us to death for our faithfulness as witness, it appears that the enemy has won! And so what is our temptation, to avoid death at all cost. To avoid difficulty. To avoid conflict. To avoid oppression. Because if we don’t, the world will consider us to have lost, right? But how does the witness triumph over the evil one? Revelation 12:11 tells us, “And they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony!” We do not defeat Satan by avoiding persecution! We defeat Satan by embracing the hope of the blood of Jesus and testifying to the work of Jesus in the midst of our persecution! It is not by comfort and ease that Satan is defeated, it is through faithfully enduring tribulation and trials as true witnesses to the goodness and grace of Christ that Satan is ultimately overthrown! Christ did not defeat Satan by avoiding death. He defeated Satan by embracing death, and the same is true for those who would follow Jesus, because the allure of Satan has no hold on those that are willing to die for the sake of the gospel.

And as the early Christians were willing to be faithful to the point of death in their testimony, the gospel spread like wildfire and turned the world upside down. Are we willing to overcome Satan by the means of our testimony in affliction and persecution?