

THE LAMB IS IN CONTROL

by Nicholas Stoddard

KEY VERSE:

Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

Revelation 5:5 (NRSV)

FAITH STORY:

Revelation 5:1-14

FAITH FOCUS:

In this passage of hope, Christ enters the heavenly throne room as an all powerful (seven-horned), all knowing (seven-eyed) Lamb. He has claimed victory over the dark powers of this world through his death and now he is declared worthy to take the scroll of God and break its impenetrable seals. This scroll contains the will of the Father and is entrusted to Christ who has power to carry out what is written. Commentator Albert Barnes writes, "when we feel that the future is wholly impenetrable to us; and when the efforts of the highest created minds fail to lift the mysterious veil which hides those events from our view," we can still hold hope for the future because the Lamb of God knows what is to come and is in ultimate control. That is great hope in a world seemingly ruled by chaos.

SESSION GOAL:

Students will understand that we can have hope because the non-violent Lamb of God is the conqueror of this chaotic world.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Hear explanations for some of the confusing symbolism in the passage.
- Identify things that cause them to feel a lack of hope and to be discouraged.
- Create visual reminders of the hope they have because of Christ's example and sacrifice.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 CD with song "We Will Dance"
- 2 Chalk/Marker Board
- 3 Bibles for everyone
- 4 Small Crosses—one per student
- 5 Thin White Ribbons—one per student
- 6 Red Sharpies
- 7 If you have musically talented students, contact them a week before class and ask them to write a song based on the songs of the Lamb [v. 9,10; 12b; 13b].

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–7 minutes)

Have the song “We Will Dance” playing as students gather. If your class enjoys singing, sing the song along with the CD. If not, say the words together, then talk about them. What does this song mean?

We Will Dance

By David Ruis

Sing a song of celebration

Lift up a shout of praise

For the Bridegroom will come

The glorious One

And oh, we will look on His face

We'll go to a much better place

Dance with all your might

Lift up your hands and clap for joy

The time's drawing near

When He will appear

And oh, we will stand by His side

A strong, pure, spotless bride

We will dance on the streets that are golden

The glorious bride and the great Son of man

From every tongue and tribe and nation

Will join in the song of the Lamb

Sing aloud for the time of rejoicing is near

(Sing aloud for the time of rejoicing is near)

The risen King, our groom, is soon to appear

(The risen King, our groom, is soon to appear)

The wedding feast to come is now near at hand

(The wedding feast to come is now near at hand)

Lift up your voice, proclaim the coming Lamb

(Lift up your voice, proclaim the coming Lamb)

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CONNECT: (5–10 minute)

Pass out the pieces of ribbon and the red sharpies. Instruct the students to write on their ribbon one thing that causes them to lose hope and get discouraged about the condition the world is in.

After students have written on their ribbons, ask them to share what they wrote.

(Their answers may involve things such as: injustice in the world, bullies, war, homework, divorce, hunger, AIDs, environmental concerns, money, poverty, famine.)

Say: *Today we are going to study a passage from the book of Revelation—a book that can be very confusing and can be interpreted in different ways.*

Let's take a look at what this passage has to do with the song we sang and the lack of hope that we sometimes feel about the status of our world.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–20 minutes)

Hand out Bibles and ask for volunteers to read the different sections: narrator, angel, elder, creatures and 24 elders, many angels, every creature, four living creatures.

Lead the students in this discussion and mini-lecture:

1 What do you think is in the scroll?

This scroll is God's complete and perfect will. It shows the course of history as it relates to God's purposes and ultimate will for creation.

2 What is significant about seven seals on the scroll?

Seven symbolizes perfection and completion; what is in the scroll is perfect and it takes someone perfect to break them open to carry it out—Jesus was that perfect person.

3 What made Jesus the right one to have and to carry out what was in the scroll?

He followed God totally while on earth and portrayed a way of life for us that is completely in the will of God.

4 What do you think it means that the slain lamb appears instead of a lion?

A lamb is not the typical animal you would associate with a victorious conquering Messiah. Jesus also did not follow the typical models of success and victory; instead of fighting back, he accepts death and is killed and in the non-violent way that defeats the powers of death. If Jesus would have called on the angel and purged the earth, it would be appropriate for John to see Jesus as a lion on the throne.

5 Why do you think this scene was such a message of hope to the first century church?

They knew that even though they faced great persecution and death as martyrs, they could trust that Jesus Christ was overseeing the events and was looking out for them because he was in control of the scroll. They also knew that Jesus had faced death too, as

a lamb, and that they could face it with confidence and bravery because he conquered eternal death and secured their spiritual destinations by ransoming them with his blood. He showed a way out of this chaotic world that didn't involve fighting back. Even though the world didn't consider him successful, Jesus redefined victory by triumphing non-violently as a servant Messiah instead of using force to win our ransom.

6 Is this message of hope just for the early church?

No, verse 9 speaks of universal salvation for every tribe and tongue and people and nation. We can all have hope that Christ showed us a better way to live and paid the price to declare us "not guilty".

APPLY: (5–10 minutes)

Hand out the crosses to each student. Ask them to tie their ribbon around the cross as a symbol of how Christ's non-violent sacrifice gives us hope so we don't have to worry about anything. We don't have to have victory as the world sees it because Christ has given us a different kind of triumph.

Go around the class, asking each student to share again what they wrote on their ribbon. This time, after each student shares, says these words in unison as a class:

Jesus the Lamb has conquered;

Therefore we have hope.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

If you had students write a song about the Song of the Lamb, ask them to share it at this time. You may also want to sing "We Will Dance" again.

Close your class time with group sentence prayers. Ask students to pray about the things that bring despair into their lives, and also to pray for the hope and confidence in the power of Jesus to see them through their times of discouragement.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

In preparation for this study, it would be good to read chapter 12, "The War of the Lamb," in John Howard Yoder's book *Politics of Jesus*. This is a crucial reading on the nature of Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain. This study may require some extra preparation from you because Revelation is a difficult portion of scripture and the students may need extra help working through the symbolism to the messages of hope.

It is important that you understand how this book is a message of hope and that is why chapters 4 and 5 are critical to understanding the nature of the chaotic and violent events that occur through the rest of the book. This story opens up Revelation with the confirmation that despite all the disorder, Christ the slain Lamb is indeed on the throne. This is the theological fountainhead and anchor point for the whole book. The throne isn't vacant; the universe isn't ruled by chaos and blind fate but by the perfection of Christ's power and insight.

We can have hope because Christ has paid the price for our acquittal in the heavenly courts

by his sacrifice as the paschal Lamb. His appearance as seven-horned and seven-eyed on the throne of God is a symbol of his complete power and perfect understanding and insight. He carried out God's will completely and flawlessly while on earth, culminating in his utter redefinition of success in his non-violent death. He is thus in line with the perfection of God and can be entrusted with the possession of the sealed scroll.

It is this scroll which contains the ultimate will of God as seen to be carried out in history. Only someone who is God can be perfect or powerful enough to open the seals and carry out what is within. Christ is that divine perfect being who has come in power as a servant Messiah.

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