

The Final Chapter, Pt. 1—Jesus Will Return  
Pastor Larry Kroon  
Wasilla Bible Church  
May 09, 2010

Gonna ask you to turn in your Bibles to the fifth chapter of the book of Revelation. Go way back to the back of your Bibles, find that last book, and let's go to the fifth chapter. And as you do so let me introduce it to you. We're coming to the very end of the New Testament here, the end of the whole Bible, and what we're gonna see in this chapter is the beginning of the end. This is where the final chapters of human history, as we know it, are opened up, and the final days begin to play out. And I'm going to read through it, and I'm going to encourage you...I know I had you find it in your Bibles...I'm going to encourage you to leave a marker there and be able to go back to it another time. But I don't want you to read it now with me. I want you to listen to me as I read it. It's interesting...the book of Revelation is the only book in the Bible that I know of that begins with...one of the early statements is an encouragement that all those who will be blessed who *hear* it. This is one of those books that one of the helpful things to do is to sit back and just listen to it read, and try to picture what it's talking about, try to see what it's describing. And so I'm going to encourage you today that instead of using your eyes to try to read every word, listen with your ears and try to picture with your mind's eye what is being described.

We're in John, the eldest of the apostles; the last one left living is given in the book of Revelation a final vision of the future. And part of that vision is a vision of heaven, and a special moment in heaven. And so he's there; chapter 4 sets the stage. He's in heaven, he's in the great throne room, God is on the throne, and it's a dramatic description of those in...the beings, the creatures and the angelic hosts that are gathered around there. And then chapter 5 opens up. And it says, "*I saw in the right hand of Him,*" speaking of God on the throne,

*I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.*

That book is the final chapter of human history.

*And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"*

'Who is is the one who is worthy to usher in the end?'

*And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. And I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals." And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. And He came and He took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying,*

*"Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people, and every nation. And You made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."*

*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, all saying with a loud voice,*

*"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."*

*And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying,*

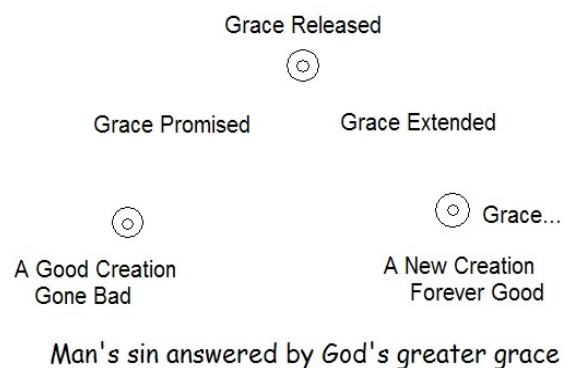
*“To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”*

*And the four living creatures kept saying “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Over this past year our teaching goal in our congregational time together has been very focused. Our target has been that by the time we are done with this year's preaching...we started in the book of Genesis and we've worked in survey fashion all the way to Revelation...and our goal has been that when we're done with this time together as a congregation, this study year...when we're done each one of you would be able to tell the story of God's grace from beginning to end; that when you look at the scriptures it won't be a disconnected set, a disjointed set, of stories and random books and styles of biblical literature and all sorts of things. It will be a story that has cohesion, and you can tell that story from beginning to end comprehensively and concisely. That's been our goal. The desire is not to turn you into trained theologians. Neither is the goal to turn you into polished evangelists. Our goal is simply that you be people who can tell the story...whether it's at the coffee shop scribbling the outline on a diagram on a napkin, or it's talking to your children as you're commuting back and forth to school and one of 'em raises a question, or it's out with your friends hunting, around a campfire one night...we want you to be able to tell the story of God's redemptive grace from beginning to end, comprehensively and concisely.

Now, we're close to that. As we've gone through this story we tried to put it into a structure and format that's easy to remember, easy to talk, easy to communicate. And we're almost done with it. And the way we put it is we live in a world...a good creation that's gone bad...and we look forward to a new creation forever good, because the sin and rebellion of mankind has been answered by an even greater grace by our God; answered with a greater grace that began with a promise to an ancient wanderer named Abraham—that there would be a descendant of his through whom all the nations would be blessed. And that promise of grace which is developed throughout the Old Testament finally comes to the point where that grace, that promised grace, is released. When the righteousness of God and the love of God came together in one person, a descendant of Abraham named Jesus, on the cross and released promised grace for all those who believed; a grace that, once released in Jesus, is now being extended to all peoples, all places, through this amazing, amazing thing, creation of God, called the church that looks so ordinary and so simple, and yet God has designed with a dynamic flexibility and adaptability that has enabled it to reach people in all cultures, all places, all times, and to survive the worst of it that has been thrown against it by the evil one.

And then we come to the final chapter, the new creation forever good, that we're yet looking for. Now for those of you who say, 'You know, Larry, I can hear you talk through it, and it really helps if I can see it, can visualize the outline', and we've got a simple outline that goes with that. A good creation gone bad, a new creation forever good that we look forward to. The main theme, man's sin, being answered by an even greater grace, a grace promised in Abraham in Genesis 12, an ancient promise given to Abraham that was released then through Jesus, the descendant of Abraham, being extended through the church, and now we're at that new creation forever good as that final chapter that we wait for, that we look for.



And here things become problematic, because it's very hard to take that final chapter and be able to tell it comprehensively and concisely. It's really difficult, partly because that final chapter of God's story is out in the future yet and we only get a look at it through prophetic visions, and prophetic words, and prophetic promises. And it speaks of things that we have never seen, that go beyond our imagination, realities that we could never comprehend. It speaks of it in images and symbols and numbers that have significance, that we're not sure exactly what's going on here. It's almost like we've gotta decode this number. And then there's linkages in the prophets where you read something and unless you know the prophecy that was given long before, it's hard to know exactly what this one means. And it's fascinating material, it's interesting material, but it's very difficult to speak of it, to tell it comprehensively and concisely. The book of Revelation, which we looked at, is the final chapter. It's led up to by many other prophecies. And we read just that one chapter I read out loud, chapter 5, and we're confronted with things in visions, and things that are beyond our imagination, and we're given phrases that we can only understand if we go back further in church history and biblical studies, and we look at that. And then it goes from there, that

moment when the scroll of the future, and the conclusion, is given to the Lion who stands as a Lamb who was slain, Jesus our Lord. And He begins to unfold that scroll of the future, the end of all things, and we go through seven seals that are broken. And when the seventh seal is broken there's the sound of seven trumpets; and when the seventh trumpet sounds there's the outflow or pouring out of seven great bowls of wrath. And you track all the way through this book, the longest book in the New Testament, and you try to track all these things that are taking place and the outline is hard to track. In fact, if you pick up one of the study Bibles and you look at it...that I looked at recently...it'll have all this going on, and then right in the middle of it is this large section, and the scholars just simply put "Various Personages and Events", and then it goes on with the outline. It's amazing material. It stretches the soul and imagination in profound ways, but it's very difficult to tell that story comprehensively and yet concisely.

But I'm convinced we can do it. In fact, my goal with this week and next week is, by the time we're done, you will be able to tell the final chapter in that story of grace in one sentence with four expandable elements; that anytime the conversation comes about the end, you can talk about it. You can tell the story, and you can do so beginning with one sentence and four expandable parts within it. That's my goal over these next couple weeks. And I'm convinced not only can it be done, it must be done. I believe we live in a time when Christians have spent a lot of time arguing and debating the details and the chronology and the sequence of events, and trying to find out everything that is not fully answered in the prophecies. In the process we have lost our grip on the life-shaping realities that are certain, and indisputable, and undebated among Christians with respect to the end. You take the certainties, undisputed and not debated, and you can tell the story in one sentence with four expandable parts.

The sentence goes like this: In the end, that final chapter, in the end Jesus returns, all are raised, all are judged, and all things are renewed. And I have deliberately avoided any kind of complicated theological terminology. In that final chapter, the final chapter begins with Jesus' return, the resurrection, the final judgment, and the renewal of all things...a new beginning in the final chapter. But most simply put, we can say in the end Jesus returns, all are raised, all are judged, and all things are renewed. You say, 'Larry, wait a sec. Larry, when you talk end times, I wanna know where's the rapture fit on this? How does the millennium fit in? Who's the Antichrist?' This is the story right here, and these are the elements of the story that should be shaping our life right now.

The first one...Jesus returns. That's not disputed. And guess what? It's not gonna be mistaken when it happens. You are not gonna miss it, ok? You're not gonna be confused. You're not gonna sit there and say, 'What was that?' Ok? Believe me. I mean, the description in Revelation, towards the end of Revelation, the description we have says all...and John says he's giving this picture of the future and he says

*And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True...*

*Revelation 19:11*

It's a vision of Jesus coming out of the heavens with a host, God's army, with Him. And it says *KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS* is written on Him, and I mean, there is no doubt that's who we're dealing with. Jesus told His disciples, when they were asking Him what the end will be like and everything else, and He said, 'Listen, don't be fooled if somebody says the Messiah has come, the Christ is over here. Let's go talk to Him!', those sorts of things. He says, 'Listen, when the Christ returns, when I return, when the Messiah comes, it is gonna be like the lightning flashing from one end of the sky to the other end, and everyone, *everyone*, is gonna know the King is here.' He's gonna return, and you will know it when He does. You will not need to get out the book of Revelation and quickly thumb through and say, 'Is it really Him?'

All are raised...there may be stages to this resurrection as they go through the book of Revelation and those sorts of things, but we know the final picture coming at the end of Revelation. The final element has this...he says...he's given a vision of the great...and I won't read the whole passage here, but the setting is John's given a vision of the great and final day before God's judgment seat. He says, "*I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne.*" And he says "*The sea gave up the dead...*" And then this is an interesting one, "*and death and Hades...*" the netherworld, "*death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them.*" Isn't that an interesting phrase? Death gave up the dead...all will be raised!

Every once in a while I'll come across a statement in a commentary that'll have me look at a verse in a new way, that I've seen many times. And suddenly this author will catch my attention at a point. In this particular verse I was reading a commentary written by a man named Christopher Wright. In fact, it's parts of his outline that I'm following here. I'm just taking three chapters he wrote on this subject, and I just love the way he put it together. And I'm

following the structure somewhat that he has. But on this verse I love the way that he approached it. He made this statement...he just highlighted that phrase right there, "*the great and the small*", and he makes this statement.

No human being will be lost sight of.

No human being will be lost sight of. All will be present and accounted for. There will be no missing persons. There will be nobody so small and insignificant that they're left out. There'll be nobody so great and powerful that they're exempted. Everyone will be there, great and small...that newborn that died in the clinic, the person that was lost at sea and nobody heard from him again...there is no one who will be lost sight of. All will be raised.

All are judged...all are judged. The phrasing here, in this same vision that John has of that final day when all are raised and they're standing before God, says "*The dead were judged from the things which were written in the books,*" the accounting of lives. And it says this, "*...according to their deeds.*" He goes on a little more and he comes back to that same idea in verse 13 and he says, "*...and they were judged, everyone of them according to their deeds.*" Everyone will be raised, everyone will be judged according to the way they lived in response to the knowledge God gave them, new creation, new conscience, and in Christ. The judge will be Jesus, the All-knowing One, sovereign over all, who is also man and knows what it's like to live in human skin, in a human culture, with human weakness. And He will judge each and every one with all fairness, and reward them accordingly...entrance into the kingdom or excluded forever. All will be judged by Jesus when He returns.

The question that immediately comes... 'But Larry, I thought we were saved by faith and not by works. I thought we were saved by believing and not by doing.' And I would say you are absolutely correct. We are saved by faith. We are justified by faith, and we will stand before God on that day...saved by faith. But hear me well. Faith is something you live. And if you have not lived faith, you do not have a living faith. Your faith is dead, it is worthless, it will have no value on that day. Jesus said there will be many on that day who will say, 'I called You LORD, LORD. We called you LORD and we did great and many things in Your name.' And His response is 'I will look at you and I will say I do not know you. I do not know you.' The Apostle Paul, writing a church in Galatia, wraps up his letter in Galatians 6:7, and he says to that congregation, he says to that church, 'Understand, God will not be mocked on this. God will not be a fool of on this. You will reap what you sow.' And he is not talking in those verses about Christians either getting reward or losing reward in the great and final day. It is very specific in those verses that he is talking about destruction and eternal life. The question will not be 'Are you a person of faith' and we reply 'Yes, I am a person of faith.' The question will be 'Are you a person of faith' and the response will be the evidence of our lives. Now, one of the mistakes here is we think that faith would look a certain way, which means 'we better get busy right now.' Listen, sometimes faith simply repents and waits.

What's the final chapter look like? In the end Jesus returns, all are raised, and all are judged. That final part is spoken in Scripture as a word of warning to make us stop, and take notice, and respond. It's also spoken as a word of promise. In fact, Paul will say that the reality of judgment, and every man being held accountable for the life he has lived, he would make sure that we understand that is part of the Gospel, that is part of the Good News. And when you think about it, it truly is; because what it does is it has with it the promise of justice. There will be a time, there will be a place, there will be a moment when justice is fully, completely done. And oh, we want that. We desperately want that. I mean, think about the conversations you hear at work. Think about the conversations you have at home. Think about the conversations you hear in the political arena. We want justice to be done!

My wife and I are gonna be going to Rwanda this summer; at least, the Lord willing, that's our plan. It's in the newsletter; don't read it now. Ok? And getting ready for that, we've of course been reading the history and background on Rwanda. We're gonna go and spend time with one of our missionary families there. And so we've been doin' this reading, and I tell you what...I'm getting where I don't want to read any more about Rwanda. 1994...somewhere between eight hundred thousand (800,000) and one million people were killed in a space of one hundred days. Eight hundred [thousand] to one million people in a thousand [should be 100] days. Imagine taking the entire population of the state of Alaska, herding them into the Mat-Su Borough, and then having an angry mob encircle 'em, and murder the entire population of Alaska...man, woman, and child...hacking them to pieces with machetes; so exhausted at the end of one day that the mob would stop and rest, arise the next day to go back into the killing field. When you read that, if your heart doesn't cry out for some sort of justice you're not human. The promise is that when Jesus returns all will be raised, and every man, woman, and child who was hacked to pieces by those machetes will see justice done. And the halls of heaven will ring "Hallelujah!" That's the promise of justice.

But with it, and this is truly astounding, is the promise of Jesus...the promise of Jesus that approaching that day, if any one of us will trust Him, if any one of us will rely on Him, He will bring us to standard for that day. He will bring

us to standard such that we can stand on that day blameless and righteous before that all-holy God on the day of justice. And we say, 'No, wait a minute. You don't know the evil thing I did twenty years ago. You don't know it! There's no way!' And Jesus would say, 'Yes. I know it. Trust Me, I can bring you to standard.' And we come back and say, 'Wait a minute. No. No. Listen, it's too late in my life. I know I didn't do anything dramatically wrong, but man, the habits have been there for so long, and everything else, and I mean I now sixty-eight years old. There's no way I can make up for sixty-eight wasted years.' And Jesus comes back and says, 'No, I know what your past has been. And guess what? I know what your future is. And you only have one more year. But guess what? I can bring you to standard, 'cause I'm Jesus. Trust Me.' You say, 'No, I'm too set in my ways. I mean, the habits have built up, and the things I've done...there is no way that as cynical and as angry as I am, and as doubting as I am, there is no way I could really turn and become caring, engaged, and involved.' And Jesus says, 'Yes! Trust Me, I can bring you to standard!' You say, 'Wait a minute. I'm too unstable. I know that today if you gave an altar call I'd be right at the front sayin' 'Save me, Jesus!' But I know tomorrow I'd be right back in the pit, Larry! I don't have what it takes to walk that road.' But Jesus says, 'Trust Me. I will bring you to standard. I will make sure your past is dealt with, every time you fall I'll be there for you, and in the end you will stand before the all-holy God, righteous and holy on the day of justice.' We have the promise of justice, and at the same time we have the amazing, gracious promise of Jesus. He will return, all will be raised, and all will be judged. There will be justice. But there's also the promise of Jesus for those who trust Him.

Those three elements put together form what is called the Great and Final Day of the LORD. And next week we're gonna come back and we're gonna look at the last element of this final chapter. As I said earlier, the chapter begins when Jesus returns, all are raised, all are judged. But it ends with a new beginning, and it is a marvelous beginning. It is so exciting! And we're gonna look at it, we're gonna talk about it next week. And it's one of the areas I find Christians most confused. And we're gonna sit back next week and we're just gonna see the glory and the wonder of it.

But right now what we're gonna do is stand, and we're gonna close with a prayer. You have what it takes to tell the story, intellectually. It's not complicated. You have what it takes...with just this simple, expandable sentence...to tell the story of the end. The challenge is to actually tell that story when the opportunity arises. This world needs to know this story.

[Congregation sings the prayer song.]

Go in that truth and grip that grace. In Jesus' name, amen.