

Rod Cuellar: 6/2/20

Revelation

The book of Revelation begins with John, isolated (sound familiar?) on the island of Patmos. It is in this time of “aloneness” that Jesus shows up, and he ushers John into a world like no other. In chapter four John is carried “in the spirit” into the very presence of God. He describes a throne that thunders with bolts of lightning, surrounded by a rainbow. This throne sits on a “sea of glass”, surrounded by 24 thrones that have 24 elders who are wearing 24 crowns. Day and night, they place their crowns before God as they bow and worship him. They PROCLAIM that God is WORTHY of all praise and honor.

Their chorus is joined by four creatures, each one covered in eyeballs from head to toe. A human face, a flying eagle, a lion, an ox-those are their faces, John tells us. They hover around the throne, each creature having six wings. And each creature chanting, over and over and over, “holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is, and is to come.”

Add to this the tens of thousands of angels, proclaiming that Jesus is worthy to open the seals on the scroll-and you have a very loud place, don't you think? I struggle, picturing heaven this way. I had always imagined heaven as being quiet, peaceful, serene. But John describes something very different. Voices and thunder, an eternal soundtrack that has but one purpose: to proclaim God's holiness.

This soundtrack is the background, as the Lamb opens seal after seal. One cataclysmic event after another, with each opened seal. War, famine, plagues, natural disasters, the antichrist-each opened seal unleashes pain and misery. And death.

The last seal is unique, at odds with its predecessors. No violence follows its release. No calamity. No agony or despair.

John says “When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” (Rev 8:1 NIV)

Silence enveloped the once very noisy realm that John was describing. The multitudes, hushed. The creatures, calmed. The elders, stilled. And I imagine, if the silence was complete-even the thunder from the cloud surrounding the throne, that too fell eerily quiet. For half an hour, there was silence. And what makes this event as cataclysmic as the others is one simple truth-time interrupted eternity.

For in heaven, until that moment, EVERYTHING had been eternal. The creatures had ALWAYS praised God. So had the Elders and the multitudes. In heaven, God has ALWAYS been praised. Forever. For eternity. Until that seal.

The eternal fabric of praise and worship, torn. Time interrupted eternity. And, as if that wasn't incredible enough, John tells us why God ordered all of heaven to be quiet. “3 Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand.” (Rev 8:3-4 NIV)

God commanded that eternity be interrupted, that the praise He so richly deserves be paused-so He could hear our prayers. I love that John offers no qualifiers. He doesn't say “the

holiest” or “most important” prayers. Neither does he say “the holiest” or “most sin free” saints. God paused, so He could hear ALL the prayers from ALL His saints.

Its an image of God that I would have struggled to believe, until I became a dad. God had always been majestic, powerful, holy, far too busy with important things from important people. Life and death were in His hands. But a God who stops EVERYTHING, just to lean forward and listen to His child? Is it possible that this ever-so-holy and all powerful Creator could go as far as altering heaven, just because I said “um, Abba...” Before having kids, you’d have a hard time convincing me.

But I have two boys now. I had the unexpected blessing of being “Mr. Mom.” I have the kind of relationship and life experience that few fathers get to have with their sons. And because Jesus said “you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matt 7:11 NIV), that gives me COMPLETE confidence in this:

God listens to His children. He really does. The same God who hung on a cross hangs on to our every word. God listens.