

TRINITY SUNDAY  
REVELATION 4, 5, 6, 7

by  
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THE PROTESTANT FAITH

To-day is Trinity Sunday and our attention is particularly directed to the character of God who is not a simple single entity, but is a fellowship within Himself. We ourselves are conscious of separable aspects in our own natures, such as our thinking, our wills and our feelings, yet we remain one entity, one being; but we are not an undifferentiated unity, but an organised unity, one remaining one, although we have different aspects of our consciousness. And the unity of God is similar, yet more profound. Within Him there are not merely three aspects of being, but three modes, or persons, if you like to use that term, who remain one in an intense organised unity.

This is God's character as He has revealed Himself to us. We would never have realized this apart from Revelation; but now that he has revealed it to us, we experience God as Trinity when we know God the Father who created us; and the Son, Jesus of Nazareth, who having become one of us died for us, so that we who are His died in Him to sin and its condemnation and rose again in Him for eternity, and reign with Him; and the Holy Spirit who indwells us and guides us and transforms us into the character of Jesus. We experience and know the one God in these three modes or persons, each of whom we know as the true and only God.

There are many passages of

Scripture which reflect God's character as Trinity, but none perhaps more vividly than the Book of the Revelation, the last book in the Bible. The book is, as you know, composed of visions which are rather baffling at first, but their meaning is to be found in the rest of the teaching of the Bible. The Book of Revelation does not convey new knowledge so much as underline by its vigorous imagery, what we learn about God and His purposes in the rest of Scripture. The pictures and imagery of Revelation are very powerful to convey the truth to our minds, and they are to be interpreted by the rest of the teaching of the Bible.

Let us consider the visions of chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. The writer is given a vision of Heaven: the first thing he sees is a throne, reminding us that the basic fact of the universe is that God rules. Then he sees one sitting on the throne in glory. The throne is surrounded by the thrones of God's people, and by the created universe, represented by the four living creatures. The chapter concludes with a song of praise from the whole of creation: "Worthy art Thou our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and honour and power, for Thou hast created all things and through thy will they were and were created". God is Creator and Ruler. This is the first lesson of the vision, but as the writer looks another vision is super-imposed. He sees Jesus in the midst of the throne in the form of a lamb who has been

slain. In this way the writer underlines the fact that Jesus is Divine, sharing in the throne, and yet human, of the tribe of Judah, descended from David, the lamb who has died for men, and yet who is described as the Lion, for He has overcome. The writer also sees the presence of the Holy Spirit as seven stars in the hand of the Lamb; and the song of those around the throne of God changes from praising God for creation to praising Him for salvation. The writer hears the words "Worthy is the Lamb that has been slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing: and every created thing which is in the Heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying unto Him that sits on the throne and unto the Lamb be the blessing and the honour and the glory and the dominion for ever and ever." Creation says Amen and God's people fall down and worship. This is the scene of heaven as we are to imagine it at the present moment.

In the next chapter the scene changes from heaven to earth as the seals of the book of the world's destiny are opened. First we see four horses and their riders, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse who represent the four-fold character of the world as we experience it. The first rides on the white horse; he has a bow in his hand and a crown on his head, and goes forth conquering and to conquer. He



represents the domineering spirit of man. The Greeks had a word for it - "hubris", the swelling arrogance - whether of the tyrant king who tramples nations under him, or of the tyrant businessman who swallows up all the rest. God-ignoring humanity is characterised by it. Pride, arrogance, self-assertion. The second horse is red, and the explanation is given that he stands for the enmity by which men fight against one another and which has written the sorry tale of wars from the beginning of history. The third horse is black. The horseman has a pair of scales and he is a trader and is selling the commodities which sustain life at fantastically high prices and he is taking special care of the luxuries of life. He stands for the covetousness, the avarice and the greed so often found in human relationship, and the fourth horse is a pale greenish grey - the colour of a corpse. It stands for death which is the end of all human endeavour which leaves God out. Apart from God all is vanity, it has no future, for death takes it all away; but in Christ our labour is not in vain.

When the fifth seal of the Book of Destiny is opened there is a vision of God's people, persecuted but patiently enduring the day of God's salvation. This vision reminds us that Christians, if faithful to God, must anticipate persecution and suffering, even martyrdom in this life, just as Christ suffered. We must not regard it as something strange; but it is not the

whole truth. The sixth seal brings before us God's judgment which follows godlessness and wrong and which is as real an aspect of the present world as is the suffering of Christians or the sinfulness of society, depicted by the first five seals. None can escape this judgment whether great or humble. And the kings of the earth and the princes and the generals and the rich and the strong and every slave and every free man hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains and they say to the mountains and the rocks Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath is come and who is able to stand."

But as the judgment proceeds the vision returns to Heaven and we see God's providential salvation protecting His people in the day of judgment. An angel with a great seal is directed to impress a distinguishing mark on the foreheads of God's people so that they may be saved in the day of judgment. All are sealed, 144,000, the number of completion. None are lost; as Jesus said during his ministry, no-one can pluck us out of his father's hands. As we put our faith in Him, God seals us with His seal as His for eternity. The writer now sees a huge crowd, beyond counting, made up of people from every nation and tribe and race and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palms in their hands, singing and

praising God for salvation. He asks and is told who they represent. They are Christians who have been saved through Christ. "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God and they serve Him day and night in His temple." This is the other side of the picture of persecution and suffering. They enjoy God's fellowship and care. Troubles and sufferings and persecutions are passed. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd and shall guide them unto the fountains of the waters of life and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

In these chapters of Revelation we have the picture of reality as it now is: the world with its arrogance and tyranny, its quarrelling and greed and death; the Christian's calling to be faithful and patient; God's judgment and God's salvation -- which is his own presence with his people. As we see the world as it is and as we experience it, the writer would have us always remember God who never changes. God the Creator reigns; Christ the Saviour has overcome and shares in that reigning and His people reign with Him around the throne of God. Thirdly, God through His Spirit is in fellowship with His people; sealing them as His, preserving them in the midst of suffering and judgment, wiping away every tear in tender

fellowship.

Trinity Sunday calls us to  
refresh ourselves in the character of  
God in whom we believe.

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