

# The Image Redeemed

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We've seen the image of God given at creation. We've seen the image of God attacked at our fall into sin. And, we've seen the image of God rescued by Christ. This week, we'll see the image of God redeemed or resurrected or totally restored. Today, we'll meditate upon where God is taking us and why. And, we'll contemplate how it reveals God's plan to bring himself glory through a beautifully diverse people who reflect his majestic image throughout all creation.

Let's read our passage from the book of Revelation. Now pay special attention to the imagery in Revelation because it's a unique genre called apocalyptic literature, and it's highly symbolic. So, first allow it to guide your feelings. Let the imagery direct your heart. Second, take-in the overall impression. Don't get lost in the details. Instead, try to capture the broad picture being communicated.

So, with that in mind, listen to the word of the Lord as it has been preserved for us in today's text of Scripture.

## **Revelation 5:6-10**

<sup>6</sup>Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup>He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup>And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. <sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased for God  
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

<sup>10</sup>You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth.”

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Let's pray before we begin. Let's ask our Lord to guide and teach us.

Now, there's much we could look-at and tease-out in this passage of Scripture. However, today I want us to focus on the relationship between diversity and beauty which we find in it. I want us to contemplate the nature of the future joy we all have in Christ. To get at this idea, we want to ask (1<sup>st</sup>) What makes something beautiful? and (2<sup>nd</sup>) How do we see that in this text? Let's answer each question in turn.

### 1. What makes something beautiful?

I'll bet you don't regularly sit around contemplating why things are beautiful or why things are not beautiful. It's not how most would choose to spend their time. Yet, I'll bet all of you know beauty when you see it. Most here will say that the glory of a sunrise or sunset with its progressing colors and rays of light is a beautiful thing. Most of us will admit that driving through the hills of Wisconsin or New England during the autumn-turn is spectacular and a joy to behold. But why?

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a 19<sup>th</sup> century English poet, reflected on these things in his poem "Pied Beauty." Pied is a word which describes things which have two or more different colors. Let me read his poem for you.

*Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.*

*All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins: *Poems and Prose* (Penguin Classics, 1985).

Manley Hopkins is reflecting on the diversity of colors and shapes and types which compose God's creation and make it strikingly beautiful. It is not sameness (he proffers) that makes something beautiful. Rather, it is the differences in creation and the contrasts in creation which come together and are glorious in unity.

Let me offer up an opposite example. Have you ever seen *The Stepford Wives*? If you haven't, it's the story of the town of Stepford, Connecticut and its residents. The town is disturbingly "perfect" specially the wives of the town. They're all pretty and submissive and domestic and uniform in every way. One new arrival to Stepford is alarmed by this. She imagines they're all robots. She imagines there's a conspiracy among the men. Instead of finding this "perfect" little town charming and beautiful, she is horrified by it. She finds it repulsive and ugly. Why? Friends, she finds it ugly because it lacks difference; it lacks diversity. It is too uniform and, therefore, ugly. *Undeniably and disturbingly ugly!* It's not a romance; it's a horror story.

(The same could be said of the vision that the Nazis, Pol Pot, or the KKK had. Extreme uniformity is truly ugly.)

So, again, "Glory be to God for dappled things." *For all the Lord's diversity! For all the differences in creation! For the beauty in its contrasts!*

Well, let's dig into the Bible when it comes to this idea.

## **2. How do we see that in this text?**

Well, to begin, we see this reflected in our Savior. We see it in Jesus Christ. He is not uniform in John's vision. He is described with a striking and vivid diversity. And, yet, that diversity is completely and perfectly united. Look at the text with me. Look at John's vision of Jesus.

*Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes... (v. 6).*

This is what John saw in his vision of Jesus. But, it's not what the apostle saw in the verse just before this. There John sees "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (v. 5). So, in just two verses, we are given the Lion—with unrivaled and fearful strength—and the slain Lamb—the image of humility and of atoning sacrifice. What contrasts!

What distinct images! Yet, they are beautiful because of their diversity in the unity of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

- Pure power is a fearful thing—not beautiful in and of itself.
- Pure humility is a pitiful thing—not beautiful in and of itself.

When, however, these two are brought together, they are gloriously stunning. When power is used humbly and lovingly, it is beautiful. When humility is exhibited in power, it is beautiful. And, this is precisely what we see on display in our Savior. It's what is pictured here. It's what one pastor describes as “the stunning mingling of majesty and meekness.”<sup>2</sup> *Friends, do you see?* Beauty isn't merely a simple thing; it's a complex, diverse thing—a complex, diverse unity.

And, this is precisely what will make the glorified church shine for all eternity. We see that here too. Who will our beautiful Lion-Lamb Savior rescue and glorify? *A dappled spectrum of image bearers! A pied church!* That's what the apostle sees in his vision.

*...persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. / [Jesus has] made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, / and they will reign on the earth (vv. 9-10).*

This is where we're headed in Christ. And, this is where Jesus wants to begin to take us now—to racial sanctification, to a great beauty that can only be expressed by the power of the Lord knitting us all together as he puts to death the dividing wall of hostility between us (Ephesians 2:14). This is why Christ shed his precious blood, to purchase this people and this future.

My dissertation advisor used to ask our class—a diverse class with individuals from around the globe—to share a thing from their unique culture that they longed to see redeemed for the glory of God. What would it look like? How would it contrast with all the other glorified cultures represented? What joy would it bring to the Lord and to the nations? How beautiful will it be to see the diverse throngs experience it? We'd just sit and share and imagine it all. It was a thrilling exercise.

So, let's do it. I mean, we have a fairly diverse congregation; don't we?

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: The Lion and the Lamb*, 29-30. You can read more [here](#).

What would you bring? What would you introduce to the peoples and nations? What would you bring to worship and glorify God? Now, imagine the joy and praise and celebration it will bring to the diverse peoples and the many nations of the earth. Imagine the beauty of that celebration with your culture—songs, customs, foods—sanctified among all the rest. Amen. *Glory be to God for dappled things!*