

QUESTION Your testimony of finding Jesus is something no one can dismiss - and your most powerful means of sharing faith with others. What is your story?

Revelation 5:11-14 – He who overcame sin's power hears heaven's praise

Countless angels exalt the Lamb as worthy of the highest honour and glory

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.

"Then..." – following the dramatic entrance of the Lamb to receive heaven's worship, Rev. 5:1-10.

"Ten thousand times..." – language inadequate to express a number of infinite magnitude.

12 In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"

"Worthy is the Lamb" – of a sevenfold tribute and honours reserved for God alone. The number seven signifies completeness or totality.

IN PRACTICE What John describes here is heaven's worship of God the Father followed by the dramatic entrance of the Lamb, the sacrificial and exalted title of Jesus in heaven, who is identified as the only One worthy to open the scroll, and so to take His place in the godhead and share in the heavenly worship of God. The first two readings focus on the fallibility and failure of Peter and Saul, wonderfully redeemed and restored by God's grace. This third reading is relating a parallel perspective. It reveals heaven's joy and adoration about broken, sinful mankind having found a path of salvation and restoration open to those who trust Jesus as Lord, and as the Saviour who has made a way for all who turn to Him.

QUESTION Contemporary songs often express directly praise to God for who He is, while traditional hymns are more descriptive? Which better reflects the language of heaven we see here?

PRAYER Lord, we are so aware that we have the tendency of Peter to promise and fail, and the fallibility of Saul in being caught up in our perception of correct religious order rather than seeking to know Jesus in a personal way. Thank You, Jesus, that You have made that path of return for us via the Cross, and we turn to You again now. May we receive Your grace and forgiveness and be able to play our part in extending Your kingdom. To Your praise and glory, Amen.

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

"Every creature" – in response to Christ's sacrifice, all creation gives glory to the Lamb, even those in rebellion against God in places of death and evil. Similarly "...At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father", Phil. 2:10-11.

• For further study, see Psalm 146:6, Isaiah 45:23-25, Romans 14:11, Phil 2:7-11.

14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped.

"Amen" – a conclusion of agreement.

The Living Word

www.thelivingword.uk PRINT EDITION

The Bible readings for Sunday, May 5, 2019 with commentary notes

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **May 5** (Easter 3) in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme From mistake to mission: three responses to the risen Lord

John 21:1-19 – Peter's shame is cancelled by Jesus at the sea shore

Acts 9:1-6 – The hate behind Saul's zeal is met by God's grace and love

Revelation 5:11-14 – He who overcame sin's power receives heaven's praise

Read also: Psalm 30

John 21:1-19 – Peter's shame is cancelled by Jesus at the sea shore

The fishermen land a huge catch, a reminder of a much earlier miracle

1 Afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way:

"Jesus appeared" – a further eyewitness account of encountering Jesus resurrected.

2-3 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

"Going out to fish" – they had not reneged on their call as disciples. Rabbis often kept up their occupations, Acts 18:3, Acts 20:34, 1 Cor. 4:12.

"That night" – best time for fishing was at daybreak.

4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus.

"The disciples did not realise" – in the dim half light and at a distance from shore, or (like others) divinely prevented from recognising the resurrected Jesus until the moment of revelation, e.g. John 20:14-16, Luke 24:13-16; 28-32.

5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

"Right side of the boat" – Galilean fishermen avoided handling nets from the side of the boat with the obstruction of the steering oar. This reminded them of a previous time when a non-fisherman helped them find a shoal, Luke 5:1-11.

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

"The disciple..." – Generally taken to be John, younger son of Zebedee, and one of the seven in v.2. In writing, John alludes to himself in various similar ways.

"Wrapped his outer garment..." – hearing a greeting stripped for work, Peter lacked decorum.

8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for

they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.

9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

"With fish on it" – as with the mountainside crowd, John 6:1-13, the Lord apparently created this meal.

10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

"Dragged the net ashore" – Peter heading the effort, too heavy for one man.

"Full of large fish" – and they counted out the catch, as fishermen were accustomed to do – there is no symbolic meaning in the number. The miracle showed God's abundant level of provision, as previously with water changed into wine, and feeding the five thousand, John 2:1-12, 6:1-15.

12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

"The third time" – after the time without Thomas, then with Thomas present, John 20:19-23, 26-29, not counting Mary Magdalene's personal encounter, vv.11-18.

15-16 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love Me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love You."

Jesus said, "Feed My lambs."

IN PRACTICE Peter was the disciple who made the biggest and most public mistake. Why did Jesus choose this time and place to appear to Peter and the other disciples? The answer must be to demonstrate what the good news of the kingdom is all about. Beyond miracles and encounters with the risen Lord, this is

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love Me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love You."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

"Do you love me" – two different words for love are used interchangeably in Jesus' questions and in Peter's answers. John often used synonyms for stylistic reasons e.g. "Feed My lambs... take care of My sheep... feed My sheep" (vv.15-17). The main point is Peter's three denials of Jesus reversed by his threefold affirmation of love.

17 The third time He said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love Me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love Me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love You."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

"Feed My sheep" – Jesus restores Peter, the man who denied Him, with forbearance, forgiveness and grace. This epilogue was probably added after Peter's martyrdom, more than three decades later.

18 Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

"You will stretch out your hands... someone else will dress [bind] you" – an allusion to crucifixion. Evidence shortly after mentions Peter's martyrdom at the time of Nero, AD 67-68, without giving details.

19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, "Follow Me!"

"The kind of death" – Peter held his life lightly, 2 Peter 1:12-15, writing that such suffering brings praise to God, 1 Peter 4:14-16.

a demonstration lesson of forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace – the treating of someone far better than they deserve. Jesus could have preached them a sermon "This is how you show my kingdom values to the world" but instead, He showed them.

QUESTION *When have you treated (or regarded) someone correctly as they deserved, rather than choosing to treat them better than they deserve?*

Acts 9:1-6 – The hate behind Saul's zeal is met by God's grace and love

On his way to make arrests in Damascus, Saul has an encounter with Jesus

1-2 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

"Saul... went to the high priest" – this young man must have been unusually well-connected with the religious elite to get an audience with the high priest, see Acts 7:58, Galatians 1:14.

"Letters to the synagogues" – it was usual for social superiors to provide letters of introduction for someone they recommended. These letters to the several synagogues – there were probably 20,000 Jews in Damascus – also acted as warrants for arrest.

3-4 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"
"On his journey" – best part of a week on foot, highlighting Saul's earnestness to carry out the

arrests, Acts 22:4-8; 26:9-15.

"Why do you persecute Me" – the Christian church is not a religion so much as the living body of Christ, His presence by the Holy Spirit indwelling those who have given their lives to Jesus. To persecute followers, is to hurt Jesus Christ Himself.

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," He replied.

"Who are you, Lord?" – Saul's rabbinic tradition would have understood a voice from heaven (and light) as being of deity. Paul's response "Lord" does not imply that he recognised the voice of Jesus, before Jesus revealed Himself. Other accounts tell us he saw the risen Christ in this encounter, although his travelling companions didn't, Acts 9:7.

• **For further study**, see 1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:8; Galatians 1:16; Acts 9:27.

6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

"You will be told" – Ananias, Acts 9:10-17, would explain his mission later. Christians in Damascus had to come to terms with their repented inquisitor and Saul with His dramatic, unexpected, life-changing encounter with Jesus.

IN PRACTICE Saul had not so much made a mistake as embarked on a life that was mistaken. No doubt he thought he was being zealous for God, even while participating in at least one murder, but the religious, judgmental mindset is all too capable of justifying cruelty and evil. The original religiously-correct persecutors of God's Son and suffering servant, are seen through the ages in their successors' torture and execution of believers who were 'different'. However, Saul was arrested on his journey, not by any task force, but by God's love and grace for him. His life turned around took the church far beyond Judea and gave us much of the NT.