

Return

Creation to Conclusion Series, June 26 & 27, 2021 | Revelation 5:1-10
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What would you do if you knew the future?

Colonel Johann Rall had an opportunity to know the future on December 25, 1776.

Colonel Rall led a unit of roughly 1500 Hessian mercenaries employed by the British army during the early days of the American Revolution.

He was sheltering for the winter in Trenton, New Jersey.

Earlier that year, the British and Hessians had pushed General George Washington and his Continental soldiers out of New Jersey. They were wintering across the Delaware River in Pennsylvania. The Continentals were demoralized, poorly trained, and poorly supplied. It looked like the Revolution might be over soon.

With a snowstorm howling, Rall felt safe, so he relaxed over a good meal and game of cards.

Out in the snow, General Washington had rallied his troops for a desperate, surprise push back into New Jersey. They crossed the dark, icy Delaware River on Christmas night.

A Loyalist farmer saw the Continental soldiers coming and raced to Trenton to warn Rall. He knocked at the door of the house where the Colonel was staying and sent a note in warning that an attack was imminent. Someone put the prophetic note in Colonel Rall's hands.

Can you imagine having the future in your hands like that?

Truthfully, there is so much about the future that we don't know.

Of course, we don't know the big things. We don't know what the world is going to be like in the future, and we don't know the day or place when we will die.

When we're realistic, we don't even know the little things. We may have our next meal planned, but we don't really know what we'll eat. Why? Because we don't know the future.

You might describe the future as being "locked." The future may be locked, but...

Jesus unlocks the future.

In Revelation 5:1-4 God the Father holds the future in his hand.

In Revelation chapter 4, John was invited in a vision to see into heaven to see the future.

John saw a throne room with God the Father seated on the throne. He saw God surrounded by heavenly beings praising him. Then we come to chapter 5 verses 1-4:

Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

John sees God the Father seated on the throne at the center of everything. The Father has a scroll in his right hand with writing on both sides, meaning that it is packed with information. This scroll symbolizes the future. But God the Father, who holds it, has closed it up with seven seals. The scroll is perfectly locked up.

Then we hear the voice of a powerful, strong angel ask who is worthy to open the scroll.

No one in heaven or on earth is worthy to open the scroll. Can you imagine? Everything we want to know and need to know is written on that scroll. What's going to happen? How will everything turn out? But it's locked, and no one can open it, so no one can know. John wept.

Then verses 5-7 continue with comforting news. In Revelation 5:5-7 Jesus unlocks the future:

And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

It turns out that there is one who is worthy to take the scroll of the future from the hand of God the Father, break the seals, reveal the future, and initiate what is to come.

The elder describes the worthy one as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. What does that mean? It means that he is a mighty ruler from Israel's mightiest tribe, the one prophesied to defeat God's enemies and rule forever.

The one who is worthy is also the Root of David. That means that the Messiah comes from the same line as Israel's great king, David. He is before David, after David, and better than David.

We're expecting a mighty deliverer-king. Instead, the one who is worthy looks like a lamb.

However, this lamb is bearing wounds that indicate it has been killed but is alive. This lamb has seven horns indicating that he has all power. This lamb also seems to have seven eyes, which show perfect knowledge and that the Spirit of God is poured out on the world.

This is Jesus. The Bible presents Jesus as being like the lamb sacrifices on the altar at the Temple in Jerusalem to pay for the sin of the worshippers there.

This is Jesus! Jesus is worthy to take the scroll from God the Father's right hand.

Later, Jesus will break the seals on the scroll. In some ways, Jesus' actions will reveal the future, and in other ways Jesus will cause the future. Jesus unlocks the future!

Then in Revelation 5:8-10 celebration grows because Jesus has unlocked the future.

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each 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 scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

The beings in the center of heaven get a celebration going.

In the verses that follow, heavenly beings pile on and praise Jesus because he is worthy.

It turns out that we know a lot about the future.

There are many prophecies and passages in the Bible that tell us about the future.

So, what does that future look like? Let's look at three big aspects of the future and unpack what they mean to us as we wrap up the arc of salvation history from creation to conclusion.

Jesus will return, and we will spend eternity with him.

What will Jesus' RETURN look like?

Jesus makes it clear that before he returns, there will be difficult times. The world isn't getting better; it's getting ready. In **Matthew 24:6-7** Jesus outlines some of those difficulties:

"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars ... For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places."

Jesus said that there will be strange signs. In **Matthew 24:29** he added:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

Then in **Matthew 24:30** Jesus said that he would appear:

"Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Jesus says that he will gather us (his followers) to himself in **Matthew 24:31**:

"And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Jesus' return leads to so much. It's Jesus fulfilling his promise that he will not leave the world as it is, nor will he leave us the way we are forever. Jesus' return is the prelude to our spending eternity with him.

In the future Jesus is unlocking, my friend, Mike, will be able to play the pipe organ again.

Mike was a roommate of mine in college.

I don't know many guys who like to drive jacked-up trucks with mud flaps, who also like to play the pipe organ, but Mike was that guy.

Mike was an amazing pipe organist. I would go listen to him practice in the chapel at our school, and he would play some of the most amazing music you've ever heard, like Widor's "Tocatta."

Mike is a follower of Jesus, and he was majoring in pipe organ, because he planned to play in churches all his life for the honor and glory of God.

A few years after we graduated from college, Mike had a brain aneurism. It was unclear for a while whether he would live or die. In the end, Mike lived. However, the aneurism did damage, and Mike isn't able to play the way he used to.

But in the future God is planning for him, Mike is going to be able to play Widor's "Tocatta" again for the glory of God. And that's just the beginning.

Application: Jesus' coming back gives us hope that sustains us.

We know that difficult days in life are not the end; there is something better coming.

We know that loss and sickness and pain are not the end; we will be restored.

We know that violence and conflict and evil are not the end; they are overturned.

We know that death is not the end; death is swallowed up in victory for followers of Jesus.

Knowing that changes everything for us. We are always people with hope, and our hope sustains us—sometimes through the darkest, most difficult days. Jesus—our risen and victorious Lord—is coming again!

Share: Our hope opens doors to sharing when people are searching for hope.

Non-Christians around us go through the same kind of problems we face in life. They get sick, lose things, suffer from violence and evil, and lose loved ones.

When non-Christian family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers face these situations, they are looking for answers, solutions, and the kind of hope we have.

That creates the opportunity for us to share! We get to tell them about the future that Jesus has planned for us. When a non-Christian is grieving, we get to tell them about heaven and eternal life.

When a non-Christian has lost something important to them, we get to tell them about the resurrection and how we will be whole someday!

Jesus' returning and the fact that we get to spend eternity with him give us lots of opportunities to start conversations that lead to the Good News.

Jesus will resurrect creation.

Because we believe in a future beyond this life, we have been accused of "pie-in-the-sky" thinking.

Have you ever wondered where the expression comes from?

In the early 20th century, working in the United States (particularly in factories) was quite often a really bad experience, something many people did for long hours in bad conditions.

Christians began doing outreach to downtrodden workers, seeking to give them hope.

However, labor organizers thought that Christians came with empty promises of heaven that kept workers from fighting for better conditions and lives here and now.

One labor activist named Joe Hill wrote a parody of the hymn "In the Sweet By and By" called "The Preacher and the Slave."¹ The chorus was:

You will eat, bye and bye
In that glorious land above the sky
Work and pray, live on hay
You'll get pie in the sky when you die - Joe Hill, "The Preacher and the Slave"

We have a concrete hope for a better future. That hope sustains us during this life. However, when we truly understand the resurrection and the future that God has planned for us, our hope doesn't rob us of power, drive, or determination here and now. Quite the opposite!

What will the RESURRECTION look like?

¹ <https://culinarylore.com/food-history:pie-in-the-sky-expression/>

Paul tells us about our own resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. He talks about us receiving new bodies that are imperishable, glorious, and powerful. Our new bodies will be spiritual and from heaven. He described it this way in **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Our resurrection is just the beginning. Revelation tells us that creation itself will be resurrected. In **Revelation 21:1** we get a glimpse of what the new, resurrected creation will look like:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

Then we find that all the impact sin and brokenness had on the world will be wiped away in **Revelation 21:4**:

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

That's just the beginning of what resurrection looks like.

Our hope for the future fuels our dreams now.

I don't know about you, but that future calls to me.

I long to be changed from the broken person I am into the perfect person I will be.

I long for the broken world as it is to be made into the perfect world as it should be and will be.

Getting a glimpse of what the future is going to look like just fuels my longing for the world here and now to be more and more like the world God is planning for us.

Application: Our hope for the future means we have work to do now.

We can't resign ourselves to the idea that the world as it is remains untouched and unchanged.

The Kingdom of God is breaking into the world.

Our hope for the future means we have Gospel to SHARE with people.

Our hope for the future means we also have Gospel to SHOW people.

When we can, we are called to reshape the world as it is around us now into the world as it should be, can be, and will be.

Jesus reigns forever.

What will Jesus' REIGN look like?

Sin, death, evil, and all those who have chosen sin, death, and evil are judged and put in a place where they can never do harm again.

We live forever, and Jesus is in charge of it all. He's King. We do what he wants because what he wants is what's right and will come naturally. That leads to a question:

Will we let Jesus rule?

Jesus is clearly in charge for eternity.

Let's not forget that Jesus, who is in charge for eternity, is in charge of our lives right now.

He always has been. Since the opening pages of the Bible, God has been revealing himself to us, showing us that he has a plan for our lives, reminding us that he is in charge, and that if we want joy and freedom, we will accept the fact that he is in charge and live for him.

We're not in charge of our own lives! The more we struggle, the more we try to make our own rules and live by them, the more broken and miserable we become.

Jesus' reign puts a dilemma before us, one of the most basic questions we face in life: will we let Jesus rule?

Second, are we ready?

Jesus tells us repeatedly that he will return.

Every time he tells us that he will return, he tells us to be ready.

He tells us that his coming will be sudden, that we won't be expecting it.

He tells us that we are to watch for his return, to wait for it, to be expecting it at any moment.

He tells us to work, prepare, and never give up hope.

In **Luke 12:40** Jesus put the call very simply:

"You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Are we ready for Jesus' return? Are we watching, waiting, expecting, and preparing?

A loyalist spy put a note with a warning about the future in Colonel Rall's hand on December 25, 1776.

Colonel Rall took the folded note, put it in his coat pocket, and went back to his celebrations.

All night long, General Washington ferried troops across the Delaware River. His soldiers marched through the snowy night to Trenton. In the morning, they surprised the Hessians.

Colonel Rall heard the gunfire as the battle began. He ordered the Hessians to counterattack.

Rall was personally trying to rally his troops when he was mortally wounded.

Someone carried him back into the house where he was staying. Many of his soldiers fled.

Colonel Rall died later that day from his wounds. It is said that those preparing his body for burial found the note warning of the Continental attack in his coat pocket.

God has placed a note in our hands that tells us everything we need to know about the future.

Jesus will return.

Heaven and earth will be resurrected. Sin, death, evil, and all the brokenness that results along with everyone who has chosen sin, death, and evil will be judged and put where they cannot harm us any longer.

Jesus will reign forever.

Are we ready?