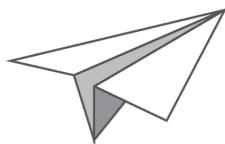


M A R C U S Y O A R S



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JESUS' LEADERSHIP,
EVEN IN THE UNKNOWN



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CHAPTER 4

JESUS, THE PERFECT LEADER

WHILE TEACHING IN Norway a few years ago, I asked a group of young professionals—teachers, lawyers, social workers, doctors, engineers—a seemingly simple question: What makes for a great leader? In other words, what are the characteristics of a great leader? They had enough workplace experience to have observed good and bad leaders, so the answers came quickly: humble, trustworthy, safe, inclusive, a good listener, compassionate, daring, bold.

Their responses didn't surprise me, as I have lived in Norway long enough to understand the unique perspective Norwegians—and Scandinavians in general—have on leadership. Their approach is called “flat leadership,” and it’s a style that highly values group dialogue, communal decision-making, and ensuring each person’s opinions are considered. A Scandic leader is separated from the pack only in terms of responsibility, not status—which is why it’s incomprehensible for a leader to “pull rank” over others. As one business school explains, “Scandinavian leaders don’t get respect from their employees just by being the boss.”¹

In Nordic nations, a good leader earns respect by creating space for each person in the group, fielding any challenges or disagreements with humility, and putting the group’s desires and vision ahead of his own. Social democracies generally think in terms of “we” more than “me,” and leaders are gauged more by how they narrow the gap between themselves and colleagues rather than what they achieve individually. Many Scandinavians subscribe to Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu’s leadership proverb, “A leader is best when people barely know he exists.”²

Is that how you would define good leadership? Does “flat leadership” sound like strong leadership to you? Before you answer that question, let me present another angle.

My hometown of Hong Kong (I was raised there as a missionary kid) has long been known as the city where East meets West. Although local culture has been far more influenced by the Western world than mainland China in recent generations (it was a British colony for more than one hundred fifty years), the Eastern element is still ever-present—especially when it comes to leadership. I

remember a few occasions when my dad returned from organizational meetings frustrated at his Chinese coworkers who, in the name of honoring their leader, refused to tell the truth about the leader's detrimental decisions and bring any hint of shame upon that person.

In Asia, as in much of the Middle East and South America, the belief is that leaders inherently deserve respect because of their position. Leadership in these regions is typically patriarchal, meaning most organizations are led by a father figure through whom everything runs and to whom everyone submits with respect (whether deserved or not). This is why in countries such as Russia, Egypt, and Mexico, bosses typically have large, lavish offices, where they sit behind massive desks in throne-like chairs higher than everyone else's while multiple assistants follow their orders. The more decisive and dominant that person is in guiding the organization, the stronger his perceived leadership.

My Norwegian friends may shudder to think of working under such authoritarian leaders, while my Chinese friends may feel it's an honor to submit to such strong leadership. Who is right? Which leadership style is better? The truth is, how we define great leadership depends on our culture. We categorize a leader as "strong" according to our own cultural standards. So what a Dane describes as a great leader will often sound like a weak leader to someone from Malaysia. And what a Guatemalan considers brilliant leadership will likely offend an Australian.* This doesn't mean one is right and the other wrong; it simply means we define leadership by different standards according to where we live.

This also means if I were to ask people from every nation the same question I asked those Norwegian students—What makes for a great leader?—I would get an impossibly broad list of adjectives covering everything from decisive to diplomatic to divinely inspired. As much as we honor history's "greatest" leaders—Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, Mahatma Gandhi, Alexander the Great, Nelson Mandela, Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr.—none of those men could be described with all those adjectives at once.

And yet Jesus can be.

He is the only person in history who can meet the leadership expectations of *every* culture. Take a moment to wrap your head around that truth. Jesus is the

* If cultural differences in leadership interest you, I recommend checking out Geert Hofstede's studies on "power distance" and his Power Distance Index, which measures how much a society embraces the gap between leaders and subordinates.

humblest, most “we”-thinking leader ever and yet still the most authoritative. He is more uncompromising than the world’s most renowned dictators, yet His compassion for people in every sphere of society is unmatched. He shows mercy to those whom even the most gracious judge would not pardon, and simultaneously He will challenge those whom the world considers beyond reproach. His leadership is complex, profound, and beautiful. It is perfect.

A U T H O R I T Y A N D S U B M I S S I O N

Jesus stands out among all of history’s other leaders for countless reasons. He is, after all, the only human who is also God in the flesh, with the “government ... on his shoulders” (Isa. 9:6). Yet one of Jesus’ most remarkable traits as a leader is how He leads in a dualistic way that the world cannot comprehend: with full authority and full submission.

By earthly standards, authority and submission seem contradictory, or at least polar opposites. The more authority I have, the less I need to submit to anyone or anything. Authority leads to power, and in our world, power is the ability to influence others—in plain English, to tell them what to do. As strongman-turned-politician Arnold Schwarzenegger once said, “Ninety-five percent of the people in the world need to be told what to do and how to behave.”³ So according to this thinking, a powerful person is not one who submits to others; instead, his power is revealed based on how others submit to his authority.

Jesus, as usual, turns worldly leadership on its head by ruling with both authority and submission. How does a person rule with submission? We find the answer in Paul’s glorious description of Jesus in Philippians 2:

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

—VV. 6–11, NLT

Jesus was divine before coming to earth, yet His humble obedience to the Father's plan resulted in His current position of having authority over everything "in heaven and on earth and under the earth." He is now in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father and exalted "to the place of highest honor." And though His glory hasn't been fully revealed, we know one day, when He has established His eternal kingdom in a new heaven and new earth, *every* person will recognize Him as Lord.

So even if the world we live in hasn't seen or experienced the full extent of Jesus' power, is there any question whatsoever about His authority? Absolutely not! Jesus has *all* authority. Even in a still-broken world contaminated by sin where the forces of darkness have yet to be expelled, He is still in charge.

Why, then, has He not revealed that authority to everyone? Why has He waited so long to unleash His power against all that corrupts this world? Answering that requires looking at how Jesus has handled His authority and power in the past.

I'VE GOT THE POWER!

Imagine you came to a party at my house and I introduced you to two of my friends. I then announced to the group that there would be a twist to the evening: We would be heading out into the wild and would need to follow the orders of one of these two friends, but it was up to you to pick who would command us.

One of the guys looked old and serious, acted a bit reserved, and was not that talkative, while the other was young, charismatic, likable, and clearly the life of the party. Which one would you naturally pick to lead us? What if I told you the first friend was actually a retired Army general who had led hundreds of thousands of soldiers, and that my other friend stocked inventory at a local grocery store? Would that change your pick?

It's amazing how quickly we will follow someone with authority.

Jesus had every right to tout His authority as soon as He arrived on earth. It was His prerogative to demand the world's attention and notify every human that God Himself was now walking the planet. He didn't just have power; He had *all* power! As the Son of God, He didn't have just a little bit of authority; He had *all* authority over every other form of authority on the planet! Yet God the Son allowed Himself to be "made lower than the angels for a little while" by taking on human form (Heb. 2:9), and as a man named Jesus, He allowed Himself to be underneath the authority of those on earth.

Rather than immediately showing everyone how great and powerful He was, Jesus took the humble route of growing up a craftsman's son in a tiny farming village. If you or I were Master of the Universe, I'm certain we would've picked another path more suited for divinity. Nevertheless, Jesus remained perfectly obedient to the Father's plan, which was the way of submission.

Jesus did not only obey His heavenly Father, however. He also spent His entire childhood—and probably more—following directions from His earthly father, Joseph. Though the Gospels' accounts are silent on most of Jesus' upbringing, we know Joseph was a craftsman who raised Jesus as his son.[†] As the eldest son in a Jewish family, Jesus would have been expected to take over His father's business. That means He probably spent much of his youth and possibly even young adulthood working as Joseph's apprentice, learning everything He could from His father about how to build things. Yet can you imagine what it was like for Joseph to teach Jesus, knowing his earthly son/apprentice was ultimately his supreme Master?

Once again, Jesus' humility and self-restraint are astounding. He never abuses His authority, nor does He force His power upon anyone without submitting to His heavenly Father's wishes. In His own words:

The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing.

—JOHN 5:19

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

—JOHN 6:38

I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

—JOHN 8:28

I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

—JOHN 14:31

[†] Whether Joseph and Jesus were carpenters is uncertain, given a centuries-old translation issue with the Greek word *tekton*, which is more accurately translated as “craftsman” or “builder” and leads some scholars to think Jesus worked more with stones because Nazareth was near a major stone quarry. For more information, see Robby Galatty’s book, *The Forgotten Jesus*.

What humility, obedience, and submission! Throughout His life on earth Jesus modeled this way as a different kind of leadership, one built upon submission in which the master becomes the servant. Jesus submitted to Joseph as a youngster, even when He did not have to. At times, He submitted His plans to meet others' requests (such as performing a miracle at His mother's appeal or healing the Canaanite woman's daughter). And He always perfectly submitted to His heavenly Father's will.

Jesus was willing to submit in a way no one else ever has. Remember, just because He had taken on human form doesn't mean He was any less divine. He had every right and, as God, had all power to say at any moment, "No, I do not want to do this." I wonder how many times during Jesus' life on earth He was tempted to go that way. Obviously, His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane gives us a snapshot of Jesus' thoughts at the pinnacle of pressure. Praying with such intensity that His sweat was like drops of blood, Jesus said, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Matthew's account records a second prayer in which Jesus' submission to the Father seems to have grown stronger even as His anguish increased. He doesn't even mention His own will: "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matt. 26:42).

This type of submission is not only remarkable and unworldly but also unsettling. For the leader of the world to be submissive like this turns our natural value system upside down. It dismantles the foundations of our humanistic ideals (especially regarding power and authority), and if we are honest with ourselves, it offends us to the core. After all, it's one thing to yield to God, but what kind of all-powerful leader caters to the will of no-name, unruly outcasts (lepers, beggars, Gentiles, the "unclean")? How strong of a leader are you when you refuse to do *anything* without first consulting another authority in heaven? Based on our earthly understanding of what a leader should be like, Jesus' leadership seems weak and even absurd. Why would we ever want to follow Him in the way He followed His Father?

LEADING THROUGH ... SUBMISSION?

My wife and I teach a marriage course based on Paul's instructions to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5. It's a passage that gives believers fits if misunderstood and one that unbelievers use to mock Christianity, all because of one word: *submit*. Indeed, as soon as I start reading verse 22 aloud in our

class, “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands,” I feel the tension rising in the room. Is there any wonder why? Generations of globally accepted sexism and misogyny—especially in the church—prompted a feminist revolution that has transformed many cultures. As a result, the word *submission* now brings to mind apron-clad housewives having dinner ready as soon as their dominating husbands return home from work to remind them that the man is the “head of the household.”

Jesus had another way to define submission—both for women (His valuing of them was revolutionary) and men—that did not involve holding power over someone. Instead, Jesus’ way was about going “lower” than others, even when you were rightfully above them. He modeled the radical concept of leading through humility and service.

How did Jesus model this so perfectly? How did submission come so naturally to Him? I believe it came out of His identity within the Godhead. And I believe that by seeing how the term *submission* works within the context of the Trinity, we can rediscover its original intent and meaning. Let me explain.

Whereas today we associate submission with domination, Jesus modeled submission as a posture of going low not just to serve but also to lift up someone else. His definition of submission was about deferring to others and even preferring their “exaltation” over your own. Within the Trinity, this is what is constantly happening. Each member lifts up the others. Jesus loves to bring glory to the Father, the Holy Spirit loves to exalt Jesus, and the Father loves to honor His Son by His Spirit.

The early church fathers used the word *perichoresis* to describe this unique relationship within the Trinity. Each person of the Godhead is intimately part of the other (the theological term is interpenetration) yet still unique. *Perichoresis*, then, describes this divine relationship of indwelling with union yet uniqueness. Within the very Triune nature of God is not the exaltation of “self” but instead a desire to bring glory to another. As author-pastor Tim Keller described, “The life of the Trinity is characterized not by self-centeredness but by mutually self-giving love.”⁴

Jesus perfectly submitted to the Father’s will, even to the point of giving up His life and dying in the worst possible way. That submissive act—along with Jesus’ entire life of submission and obedience—brought glory to the Father, yet the Father in turn glorified the Son. Through perfect submission, Jesus received all authority, as we read earlier in Philippians 2:9: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every

name.” And yet at the end of this beautiful description, what is the ultimate purpose of every person recognizing Jesus’ lordship over all? It is “to the glory of God the Father” (v. 11). Even as the ultimate leader and the rightful Master over everything, Jesus *still* seeks to glorify the Father. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit submits to both the Son and the Father while forever seeking to glorify Jesus. What an incredible relationship!

If diving into the Trinity confuses you, don’t worry—trying to explain the Triune God has baffled the church for generations. My desire is not for you to get lost in theological pondering over the Trinity, but simply to sense the power of submission through this beautiful picture of the Godhead. God, the Triune being, is the ultimate leader. If within Him exists constant submission—ongoing service to one another—then how much more do we need this aspect ingrained in our thinking of leadership. If we are offended by Jesus’ submission as a leader and see it as “weak,” then maybe our definition of leadership has been defined more by this world’s standards than by God’s.

Jesus served to perfection. He is the definition of servant leadership, and He showed us how perfect leadership involves both authority *and* submission. He led that way while on earth, He continues to lead that way in heaven now, and He will one day return to this world and display this perfect leadership as its rightful ruler.

A RAGING WORLD

Let’s be honest, though. Does it look like Jesus is leading the world right now? Even if Jesus leads with perfect submission, does it seem like He is still in control? Hatred dominates the headlines in the form of racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and xenophobia. The world’s economies are in chaos. Leaders flaunt their godless agendas while the masses applaud. Violence, poverty, famine, corruption, disease—these are the conditions of everyday life. As believers, we cry out for Jesus to do something, yet people mock us for believing in an ancient God who seems to no longer respond. And so, as evil continues to escalate, we’re left hanging onto this thing called faith, believing—*hoping*—that the Lord sees all and one day will bring about justice.

Do you realize the Bible paints the exact same picture of the era immediately preceding Christ’s return—what we call the end times? I briefly mentioned in the last chapter that Psalm 2 gives us a snapshot of the world raging at Jesus. King David wrote these prophetic words more than three thousand years ago, yet they could easily describe what is emerging today:

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, “Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.”

—PSALM 2:1-3

The “nations” of this passage—leaders of all types and people from everywhere—oppose God because they feel He is restricting them. More specifically, they “conspire” against Yahweh, the God of Israel and “his anointed,” which is Jesus the Messiah. (Our word *messiah* comes from the original Hebrew word *mashiach*, meaning “anointed one.”)⁵

The people’s common hatred for the Lord galvanizes their attempts to “break their chains and throw off their shackles” (Ps. 2:3). What chains and shackles do these raging rebels want to be rid of? The ways of God. The people no longer trust God’s definitions of what is right and wrong but instead feel they are confining, restrictive, and outdated. In true humanistic fashion, the nations believe humanity is so advanced that they should be the ones defining truth and morality, not God. Their rebellion is like a looping video throughout human history: We want to lead rather than follow. Ultimately, the people of Psalm 2 want to be God—to act like Him, lead like Him, rule like Him.

If you don’t think this applies to today, let me remind you that within the last sixty years we have witnessed a global moral revolution unlike any other, particularly in nations with Christian roots. Societies once established on biblical truths and values have now become the leading proponents of defying those very morals. Increasingly, both governmental authorities (“the kings”) and cultural leaders (“the rulers”—celebrities, CEOs, sports stars, academics—believe they are doing people a favor by removing the Bible’s “old-fashioned” morals from society. In recent years, nation after nation has established legislation directly opposing God’s Word on such foundational social issues as marriage and divorce, immigration, sexuality and gender, poverty, parenting, identity, and life in general (from when it begins to when it ends). This tidal wave of godless legislation continues to impact other nations and, in turn, shape beliefs, morals, and lifestyles.

WHEN JUSTICE SEEMS LATE

The world is raging and will only increase in its hatred of Jesus, His ways, and His leadership. Of course, not *all* nations, peoples, and leaders will shake their

fists at God, nor will everyone plot against His anointed. The Book of Revelation reveals a remnant of end-time believers who refuse to yield to the onslaught of humanism and who remain true to the Lord, even at the cost of death. Today an estimated one hundred thousand people around the world die each year for their faith in Jesus, while millions of others are persecuted.⁶ Yet their collective cry is the same as that of those in the last days:

When he [the angel] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, *“How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”* Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.

—REVELATION 6:9–11, EMPHASIS ADDED

How long, Sovereign Lord? How long? Faithful followers of God have asked that question throughout history. In Psalm 94 the psalmist describes the Lord as “a God who avenges” and the “Judge of the earth” who pays “back to the proud what they deserve.” Yet only two verses later, he asks, “How long, LORD … how long will the wicked be jubilant?” (94:1–3). Asaph sang with a more loaded tone: “How long will the enemy mock you, God? Will the foe revile your name forever? Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?” (Ps. 74:10–11). The prophet Habakkuk brought even a tinge of accusation into his questioning: “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (Hab. 1:13).

The question of God’s justice remains as relevant for us today and can make it difficult to trust the Lord in the journey of fellowship, much less enjoy Him through it. Every recent generation has seen protestors marching through city streets around the world, standing up against injustices such as racial profiling, police brutality, governmental oppression, and the denial of human rights. Their voices may temporarily change situations, but at the end of the day, history proves we will still be left with evil in the world, which will always lead to more injustice. How, then, as believers do we reconcile a just God with the injustice we see around us every day? If Jesus is perfect in His leadership,

why does He allow evil to rule the world instead of putting His foot down and saying, “Enough is enough!”

How long, Lord?

God knows His followers will continue asking this question until the day He brings full justice. I believe this is *exactly* why Jesus gave us the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1–8. If you have never read the parable, here’s a summary (though I encourage you to study the passage on your own): A widow repeatedly approached a crooked judge to grant her justice against “her adversary.” We’re not sure who this adversary is, what charges they brought against her, or why she was continually having to appeal to this judge. What we do know is this judge “neither feared God nor cared what people thought” (v. 2). Stated another way, he did not care for truth nor what was right. The very person who was supposed to represent justice and function as its extension was himself unjust.

I have been at the mercy of a judge only once in my life, to appeal a speeding ticket as a young man. Even then, I approached the judge’s bench to explain my case with trepidation, knowing this man had the power to affect my future. (The penalty of losing my appeal was worse than if I had not appealed in the first place, so that should explain my nervousness.) Can you imagine, then, what the widow must have felt going to a judge she—and the whole town—knew was unjust? And to think this was the only person who could make things right for the widow!

Despite this, the widow continued to appeal time after time, only to be met with deaf ears and complete apathy. It seemed her adversary would triumph. Still, she did not give up and continued to voice her appeal. Eventually, the meager widow wore down the powerful judge, and he consented not because of any sense of justice within him, but simply out of a selfish motive to no longer have to listen to her annoying appeals.

Jesus created such juxtaposition between the evil judge of His parable and His righteous heavenly Father that His concluding questions are almost rhetorical: “Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly” (Luke 18:7–8).

God is nothing like the evil judge. He cares more about us than we will ever know, and He hears when we cry out to Him for justice. But do we believe what Jesus said? Do we believe God actually is just? Do we believe His “chosen ones” really will get justice? And quickly?

I have found that last part to be where many believers struggle. We question if God’s “quickly” is anywhere close to ours. As ludicrous as it sounds, we often question the Creator of time’s sense of timing. And we tend to conclude that if things don’t happen the way we think they should—in our lifetime, in a way we can prove and experience with our senses—then God is unjust. From there, our view spirals downward, because if God is not just, then how can He be trusted to be fair? And if He isn’t fair, then how do we know He won’t keep “putting [us] off”? And if it’s possible that He might ignore our cries for justice, then what is the point of crying out to Him day and night?

Can I let you in on something? God is just, whether we think He is or not. It’s who He is. He is the very definition of justice. As is the case with each of God’s attributes—love, mercy, peace, joy, and so on—we find the origin of those attributes in His very being. But simply because God is just does not necessarily mean He is always fair. And for that, we should be thanking Him, not giving up on Him. Let me explain.

There is not a person on this planet who has not sinned. Psalm 51:5 makes it clear that we are born into sin (“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”), while Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We don’t measure up to God’s standard of holiness. Whether we’ve sinned once or a billion times makes no difference in regard to our standing with a perfect God. Just as a single stain makes an entire carpet stained, a single sin makes the whole person sinful.

That’s a problem, because justice says there must be a payment for sin, and that payment, according to Romans 6:23, is death—not just physical death, but spiritual death. It’s eternity without God—an eternity of darkness, turmoil, loneliness, unrest, and all the things God is not. So our sin put us on a track destined for hell.[‡] Our only hope of rescue from this death sentence was someone who could make the payment of death, someone who despite being born into a fallen human race would never sin.

Enter Jesus.

[‡] If at this point you’re arguing that it isn’t fair for God to condemn us for something we’re born into, then try living the rest of your life without ever sinning. You’ll quickly discover that it’s in our nature to sin. Why would God make us this way? He didn’t; He made us perfectly in His image with free will to choose or reject Him. Unfortunately, just as the first humans discovered, our free will takes us down the wrong path every time and proves we must be rescued from ourselves. For more on this dilemma—and God’s solution—read Romans 6–8.

The perfect, sinless man ended up dying in our place, and this is why God is not fair. It's not fair that Jesus died for us. It isn't fair that He was mocked, tortured, and crucified. It's not fair that we did not get what we deserved. But thank God He isn't fair, and that His lack of fairness doesn't affect His justness. He is still completely just in everything He does.[§] And that leads us back to Jesus' parable of the persistent widow.

FINDING FAITH

Jesus promised in Luke 18 that God will "bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night" (v. 7). But notice the way Jesus finished His teaching with a cliff-hanger: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (v. 8).

I used to find Jesus' question puzzling, as if He had suddenly changed topics and forgotten to wrap up His parable with a nice bow on top. (As if He ever did that!) The truth is, Jesus once again used a piercing question to not only challenge His listeners' image of God but also ingeniously connect the parable to the issue of His end-time leadership.

What does it take to believe that God is just, despite what our world, our eyes, and even our experience tells us? It takes faith!

What does it take to cry out to an invisible God who doesn't seem to answer the way we think He should? It takes faith!

What does it take to believe this invisible, slow-to-avenge God will bring about justice quickly for His chosen ones, even when it seems our adversary is the one triumphing? It most definitely takes faith!

And what does it take to believe this God will one day return to right all wrongs and, in complete justice, destroy the nations that conspire against Him, rise up to break off the "shackles" of God's Word, and even persecute those who are crying out to Him for justice? It takes the ultimate faith!

We are still waiting for Jesus' return—the return of a perfect leader who will reign with complete authority, power, submission, and yes, justice. Such waiting takes faith since we have yet to see Him return. We know from the Book of Hebrews that "faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see," and that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (11:1, 6). Faith, then, inherently involves both belief (head knowledge)

[§] For a deeper look at the questions surrounding God's justice and His fairness, I recommend Jennifer Rothschild's cleverly titled book, *God Is Just Not Fair*.

and trust (heart knowledge). It's the latter that makes it easier to persevere and never give up, just like the persistent widow. We don't have faith only because we intellectually believe Jesus will return in justice; we have faith because our hearts trust *Him*. It's Jesus who has said He will return; therefore, we know He will.

I will admit that at times it's hard to believe Jesus is in control over this world, especially when evil, chaos, and injustice seem to rule our day. Our faith can be tested when the world mocks us for believing in a just God whose sense of justice seems to be failing and whose timing seems off. We may even face persecution for our faith, but the question Jesus posed two thousand years ago remains the same today: "*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*"

Will Jesus find a people who have trusted Him, remained loyal to His Word, and expected His return? Will He find a people who have continually called out to Him, day and night? Will He find a people who long for His perfect leadership?

A GLIMPSE OF THE END

Eventually, all history will culminate in one man named Jesus. He is already the centerpiece of human history, yet when He returns, humanity will witness a climax like never before. I'll elaborate more on this return in a later chapter, but for now, let me give you a glimpse of how things will end.

The human journey begins and ends under the leadership of Jesus, and in Revelation 5 we find Him at the center of everything, just as He should be. The apostle John, who wrote the Book of Revelation, was caught up in a vision of God's throne room, where in the previous chapter he described an incomprehensible yet glorious snapshot of worship in heaven: lightning, thunder, rainbows, a sea of glass, twenty-four thrones with twenty-four elders wearing crowns, seven blazing lamps, four mysterious creatures that never stop declaring God's holiness.

It's a mesmerizing scene. But as chapter 5 begins, the focus shifts to a single scroll. We don't know what the scroll is or what it says, only that there is writing on it. (We find out a bit more later in Revelation.) But we know there is a problem: No one can open the scroll. It is sealed with seven seals. In verse 2, an angel inquires, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" Yet no one—not a single person in heaven or on earth—is worthy to open it. This is so unsettling that John begins to weep bitterly—until an elder taps him

on the shoulder, says a few words, and gets John to wipe away his tears so he can see what happens next.

Jesus stands up.

With all heaven and earth fixated on Him, Jesus rises, walks over to the scroll, and takes it out of His Father's hand. I can just imagine the silence of the entire universe at that moment, with everyone mesmerized by this God-man who is called the Lamb. He can open it! He is the *only* one who can open the scroll. Not only is He able to, but He is worthy enough to. And this eternal truth sends the heavens into a massive, historic frenzy of worship.

The four living creatures, who until that point have not stopped declaring God's holiness, and the twenty-four elders suddenly throw themselves to the ground and launch into a song never heard before:

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. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

—REVELATION 5:9–10

Their singing is followed by a booming chorus from millions of angels who encircle the throne:

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!

—REVELATION 5:12

Then, as if the universe cannot contain itself, every creature—in heaven, on earth, in the air, and in the sea—shouts the loudest, most glorious sound of worship the earth has ever heard:

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!

—REVELATION 5:13

No movie can capture the sights and sounds of this scene, nor can a book or painting depict what it will be like when everything in creation worships Jesus. He is the culmination of it all, the centerpiece of existence. He is the only one worthy of such adoration. He is the longing of every nation and every person. And He is our perfect leader.

Why, then, would *anyone* not want to follow a leader so glorious and worthy? The answer requires us looking back in history to see how this conflict all started, which is what we will do in the next part.