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A0533 – August 14, 2005 – Revelation 5:8-14 – The Worship of the Lamb

Let's begin this week by introducing two important doctrinal principles related to the themes of Revelation; 1) grace before judgment and 2) judgment resulting in salvation. First, the principle of grace before judgment. Grace always precedes judgment. For example, in the days of Noah, how many years of grace did God give the world before he judged the world? 120 years. Now, how many years of grace has God given the world before He will send the Tribulation judgments? The entire Grace dispensation outlined in Rev 2-3. Second, the principle that judgment results in salvation. For example, the judgment of the Flood resulted in the salvation of all the righteous (4 men and 4 women). In the same way the tribulation judgments will result in the salvation of all Israel (Rom 11:26) and many Gentiles (Matt 25:31-46). Both believing Jews and Gentiles will enter the Messianic Kingdom in their mortal bodies. So, you want to remember the two principles: 1) grace before judgment and 2) judgment results in salvation.

Two weeks ago we looked at a Lion and a Lamb in Rev 5:1-7. At first, a seven sealed scroll is seen resting in the palm of the Father's right hand. Then, a mighty angel asks, with a voice that reverberates throughout the entire universe, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals." A universal search begins in heaven. When unsuccessful the search moves to earth. When unsuccessful the search finally moves to the underworld. The search ends without success. None are found able to open the seven sealed scroll. This causes John to weep loudly because this means uncertainty and indefinite delay for the fulfillment of God's plan in history including the restoration of the Jewish people and the re-establishment of the theocratic kingdom on earth. But John is then commanded to stop weeping because of the majestic, noble, strong, courageous Lion. The Lion comes from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49). He is the root even offspring of David (Isa 11). He has overcome by paying the redemption price which was His precious blood (Rev 5:9). Finally, John sees the centerpiece of all reality. He is not pictured as a Lion but as a Lamb. The Lamb always portrays the crucified Messiah. This Lamb is standing as slain meaning He is not dead but alive forevermore. This is not your normal Lamb. This Lamb has horns seven and eyes

seven. The seven horns symbolize His omnipotence and the seven eyes symbolize His omniscience. The all powerful, all knowing Lamb has sent the Spirit into the world as His agent to keep Him in touch with things on earth during His absence. Then the Lamb, who is in the center of the Father's throne, moves from His position at the right hand of the Father and takes the scroll from the Father's right hand. The fact that the Father permits this at this yet future time means that it is time to execute the plan of world redemption. The whole creation is longing for the consummation of God's plan. The whole creation is longing to go "back to Genesis" (Matt 19:28) and the conditions of the "garden of Eden" (Ezek 36). Finally, righteousness will rule on the earth and peace and justice and harmony will follow. Before this can take place the world must be judged. At this time the world will be ripe for judgment and His time of cleansing the earth has finally come.

Responsive Worship (8-14)

By way of response to these marvelous events in heaven the whole universe worships the Lamb and the Father. The worship begins with the four living creatures and the twenty four elders falling down, prostrating themselves before the Lamb (5:8) and ends with the twenty four elders falling down, prostrating themselves and worshipping (5:14). The 28 voice chorale is described in 5:8. The 28 are made up of the four living creatures (4:6) and the twenty-four elders (4:4). The twenty-four elders are holding twenty-four harps and twenty-four golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints. The four and twenty-four all sing a new song of redemption in 5:9-10. The Lamb is worthy of this new song for three reasons: 1) because He was slain, 2) because He redeemed them to God by His blood, and 3) because He has made them kings and priests to God. An innumerable number of angels join in a chant in 5:11-12 giving the slain Lamb a seven-fold praise for His divine attributes. Finally, every created thing adds a chant of their own in 5:13. The worship ends on a solemn note in 5:14. You can see that there is an escalation in this praise which reaches its climax in 5:13. The worship begins with 28, escalates to include an innumerable number of angels, and finally escalates to include every intelligent created thing.

The 28 Voice Chorale (5:8)

Revelation 5:8 When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

In response to one being found **worthy**, John stopped weeping. It is not time to weep, it is time to celebrate. The fact that the Father lets the Lamb take the scroll from upon His right

palm indicates that it is finally time for God's final plans for history to be unveiled by way of execution. The details of this plan are outlined in the seven-sealed scroll. This document contains step by step measures to be taken to evict the usurpers. These measures amount to the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole earth. The church, the body of Christ, will be kept from (*tereo ek*) this hour by way of physical death or the pre-trib Rapture (3:10).

Position of Worship. Thus, **when the Lamb had taken the scroll**, it illicit a response, beginning with the **four living creatures and the twenty-four elders**. They **fall down before the Lamb**. This is a sudden fall as one falling dead into a prostrate position of worship. This is the only proper response on such an immense occasion. This transfer of the seven sealed scroll is a landmark event in world history. No longer will things continue as they were since creation (2 Pt 3:5) but judgment and destruction is coming on ungodly men. From the world's perspective things are better than ever; finally, those Christians are gone so we can get something done, finally, the whole world is drawing nearer to a one world government under our brilliant world leader who has an answer to our every problem (i.e. the Antichrist). The world is building the kingdom of man once more as it did at Babel (Gen 10-11). Little do they know, because of their ignorance of Scripture, that a time of unparalleled destruction is coming; so great that if the Tribulation were not limited to seven years no one would survive (Matt 24:21-22).

Four Living Creatures. Who are the **four living creatures** who prostrate themselves in worship? They are living creatures (*zoon*), a word that is often used of domestic or wild beasts. But here they are not properly beasts but angelic beings. They have "many eyes" similar to the four living creatures depicted in Ezekiel 1:4-14, 9:3; 10:2ff, 20ff and they show some resemblance to the seraphim of Isaiah 6 with their six wings. "Together...the four living beings picture all animal life from the perspectives of greatest nobility, strength, wisdom, and speed."ⁱ Newell says, "God's designation of them gives only the number four and the fact that they are (as their four generic forms reveal) the very embodiment of created life."ⁱⁱ Thus, the four living creatures are real beings that represent all of animate creation. These four angelic beings are involved in singing the song of redemption *on behalf of* the creation that cannot sing for itself (Rom 8:20-22; Rev 5:9-10).

Twenty-Four Elders. Who are the twenty-four elders who prostrate themselves in worship? The title "elders" suggests they represent redeemed men since representatives of OT Israel and the NT Church saints are referred to as "elders" 207 times.ⁱⁱⁱ "Praise rendered to the Lamb by the four living creatures and the elders is rendered because he died. In this song is summed up the results of the death of Jesus Christ."^{iv} In light of the context, it seems

most reasonable to conclude that these twenty-four elders represent all redeemed humanity and sing the song of redemption *on their behalf*. So, we begin with four angelic beings who represent and sing on behalf of animate creation that can't sing for itself and twenty-four redeemed humans who represent and sing on behalf of all redeemed humanity. The important thing here is that the whole earth has been purchased by the blood of the Kinsman-Redeemer and is about to be taken and administered by His sovereign hand. This is certainly a time of worship.

Harps and Golden Bowls. The first thing the twenty-four elders hold are **harps**. **Harps** were common in the OT psalms, were always associated with joy, and are regularly connected with prophecy. The harp is an instrument that is almost always used in direct worship and praise of God. The second thing the twenty-four elders hold are **golden bowls full of incense**. These are big bowls with a large open mouth. Here, these **golden bowls full of incense** are identified as **the prayers of the saints**. Thus, the **golden bowls full of incense** are symbolic of **the prayers of the saints** (cf Ps 141:2).^v Prayers are often symbolized by fragrant incense that goes up from earth to heaven and pleases God. We all love something that smells wonderful. God loves the prayers of the saints because they indicate dependence on the part of His creatures and recognition of His sovereign ability.

Who are these saints? **saints**, of course, is a term used of all believers and not just spiritual believers. If you are a believer you are considered a **saint**. At this yet future time, the prayers of the saints are probably a compilation of imprecatory prayers from all ages of saints. Imprecatory prayers are those prayers by saints that have called down God's judgment and calamity upon those who persecute them. The morality of such prayers has been questioned but I think it is clear that God is holy, righteous and just and will answer these imprecatory prayers during the Tribulation period. It must also be remembered that these imprecatory prayers are inspired by God and so, truly find their origin in him and not the desires of men. So, the prayers here are a compilation of imprecatory prayers from all ages of saints. These prayers will be added to in Rev 8:3-5 by the martyrs who are already in heaven. It is interesting to note that prayer is not only for those on earth but also for those in heaven, at least during the Tribulation period.

The New Song of Redemption (5:9-10)

Revelation 5:9 And they sing a new song saying "Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break the seals; because You were slain and You redeemed us for God by Your blood from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

The Singers. The song is sung by all 28; four angels and 24 men. This is a **new song**. A **new song** was sung in response to some important occasion (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10; Rev. 5:9; 14:3). The occasion here is the taking of the seven sealed scroll from the Father's right hand by the slain Lamb. In 4:8, 11 the four and twenty-four **said** (*lego*). Here they **sing** (*ado*). Worship can come in the form of "speaking" or "singing". The bottom line for worship is:

1. Proclamation of who God is (His attributes which make up His essence)
2. Proclamation of what God has done (creation, redemption, etc...)
3. Accuracy

In chapter 4:11 God was worshipped for creation. Here the Lamb is worshipped for redemption. "Creation" and "redemption" are THE two most glorious topics of worship. Forever and ever God will be worshipped for creating all things and for redeeming that which He created. All the themes of Scripture may be seen under these two works of God.

The Song. Worthy (*axios*) is the Lamb **to take the scroll and to break the seals**. The Father was described as **worthy** in 4:11. The universe was searched for one **worthy** in 5:2-3. Here the Lamb of God is alone found **worthy**. Why? Three reasons are given:

1. **because He was slain (5:9)**
2. **because He redeemed us to God by His blood (5:9)**
3. **because He made redeemed men kings and priest to our God (5:10)**

The Purchase. The first two reasons are in the aorist tense. **You were slain** and **You redeemed us**. The aorist tense points to back to the once for all work of Jesus Christ on the cross. There is nothing more needed, God is completely satisfied with His Son. The word **redeemed** or **purchased** here is *agorazo*. In the ancient world you would go to the *agora* which was the marketplace to purchase goods. In Scripture is revealed the fact that, because of personal sin, inherited sin, and imputed sin, all men are in the slave-market of sin. We were slaves to sin and a slave cannot purchase himself out of bondage (Rom 6:17; 7:14). Thus, Christ paid the purchase price for all men to be released from the slave market of sin. However, even though the purchase price has been paid, released from the slave-market of sin only comes when one appropriates the purchase by faith. Christ has *provided* for all, but Christ *applies* the benefits only to those who believe.

The majority Text actually reads **You redeemed us for God**. Notice, first of all, the redemption is **for God**. The purchase is for His benefit. We usually think that we are the

beneficiaries in salvation, but since we are destined for His service, redemption is first of all **for God**.

The Price. What was the redemption price? The redemption price was His **blood**. The redemption here is not just for men but for the whole earth. Since Christ's redemptive work is for all creation and its application to creation is about to take place then the four who represent animate creation will burst into song on their behalf. At the same time, twenty-four representatives of redeemed humanity also sing on their behalf (Rev 5:9 "You redeemed us"). The substantial difference between the two classes represented is that the animate creation will not rule as kings and priests on earth. Therefore, the song says "*And you have made them kings and priests to our God and they shall reign upon the earth.*" Thus, this "new song" is sung by representatives of animate creation and redeemed humanity because Christ's atonement is related to both. He paid the price with His **blood**.

Redeemed Humanity. Those who will reign upon the earth **are from every tribe and tongue and people and nation**. This is a universal description of all redeemed humanity. **tribe** (*phule*) refers to descent or lineage and means close biological connection. **tongue** (*glossa*) refers to languages. **people** (*laos*) refers to race or stock and **nation** (*ethnos*) refers to political affiliation. Thus, people of every lineage, language, race, and political affiliation are represented among redeemed humanity.

Revelation 5:10 And you have made them kings and priests to our God and they shall reign upon the earth."

Kings and Priests. Of this diverse group of redeemed humans the Lamb **has made them kings and priests to our God and they shall reign upon the earth**. Positionally, the death of Christ made all redeemed believers **kings and priests**. **Kings** rule and **priests** serve. Since we are **kings** where will we rule as **kings**? John says, **upon the earth**. In the **earthly** Millennial Kingdom we will not just be people that Christ rules over but we will share in God's rule. We are presently **priests** in that we have direct access to God through prayer and petition. Christ is our Advocate. However, what we enjoy now as priests is only an introduction into the fullness with which we will function alongside Christ in the Millennial Kingdom.

Earthly Kingdom. Notice the words **they shall reign upon the earth**. The promise is not that we will **reign** in heaven but **upon the earth**. Many reject an earthly kingdom, thinking it too sensual (Origen, Augustine, Amillennialism). Although the kingdom will be **upon the earth** this does not mean it will be sensual. It will be a time of great prosperity but this

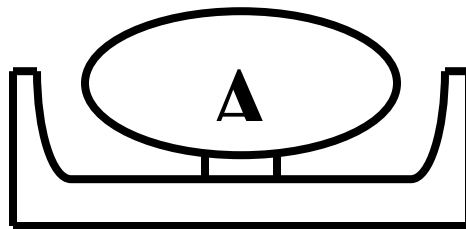
prosperity will be both physical and spiritual. The kingdom, though earthly, is essentially, spiritual in nature. Christ will be on the throne, David will be His prince, and we will reign as kings and priests on the restored earth.

Extent of Redemption. Most of us are just looking to “heaven” and fail to grasp that Christ did not just purchase us to get us to heaven. He also purchased our inheritance in the Messianic Kingdom. He purchased our kingship. He purchased our priesthood. All these things are a part of the redeeming work of the Lamb.

An Innumerable Number of Angels Chant (5:11-12)

Revelation 5:11 And I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands,

The Scene. The praise escalates to include an incalculable **number of angels**. This is the fourth thing John saw in chapter 5 (cf *kai eidon* v. 1, 2, 6, and 11). The **living creatures** make up the inner circle and the **elders** make up a larger circle around the throne. Outside of these two circles is an innumerable host of **angels**.



How many **angels** were there? John did not count. He is simply recounting what he saw (v 11). First he describes them as *polus aggelos* (many angels), then he describes them as **myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands**. The word **myriads** means “ten thousands”. A literal translation of this verse would say **ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands**. In other words, **ten thousand times ten thousand** and there is still a remainder of **thousands of thousands**. In short, this is an incalculable company of angelic beings surrounding the four creatures and the twenty-four elders.

Revelation 5:12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

The Lamb's Chant. These do not sing, perhaps they chant or simply speak **with a loud voice**. Once again, this is a *phone megale* (a megaphone) as with the strong angel in 5:2. In unison this innumerable company of angels says **Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing**. There is a single definite article before this list of seven. The single article denotes these as proclamations of His nature. This is praise for who the Lamb is. He does not receive these things, but rather Christ is worthy to receive adoration for these things that He already possesses (Beckwith).

1. **power** (*dunamis*) – potential power of His omnipotence.
2. **riches** (*ploutos*) – the wealth of a self-sufficient God
3. **wisdom** (*sophia*) – the ability to use omniscience
4. **might** (*ischus*) – the inherent strength of His being
5. **honor** (*time*) – His position by nature
6. **glory** (*doxa*) – the weight and radiance of His being
7. **blessing** (*eulogia*) – source of all goodness

This is a proclamation by an innumerable host of angels of God's essential nature.

Every Created Thing Chants (5:13)

Revelation 5:13 **And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."**

The Father and the Lamb's Chant. Finally, **every created thing** joins in saying, **"To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."** This praise is not just **to the Lamb** but also to the one **who sits on the throne**, the Father. What is **every created thing...in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them?** This refers to every intelligent created being. Thus, angels, men, and hybrid offspring, whether redeemed or unredeemed, all praise the Father and the Lamb. Thomas says,

The entirety of intelligent life in God's creation joins in, even fallen angels imprisoned "under the earth" (cf. 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6) and unredeemed humanity who must someday join in recognizing the preeminent qualities of God and the Lamb (cf. Phil 2:9-11).^{vi}

This is similar to Phil 2:9-11 where Paul says,

Philippians 2:9-11 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (also cf Rom 14:11)

This is universal praise to God and the Lamb. The specific praise they say is "**To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.**" Three of the four listed here were used in the previous chant of verse 12 (**blessing, honor, glory**). The new word here is *kratos* (**dominion**) which is another power word. Three **power** words are used as ascriptions. This power word is power at work or kinetic energy. It is God's active power. The difference in this list of four is that the definite article is used before each ascription so that it literally reads **To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing and the honor and the glory and the dominion forever and ever.** This signals that each of the four stands out sharply and distinction as in 4:11. This is like heaping up praise upon praise. This exaltation, this heaping of praise upon praise will endure **forever and ever**. Literally, into the ages of the ages. For all eternity, all intelligent created life, whether redeemed or fallen will give praise to God and the Lamb.

Revelation 5:14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

The **four living creatures** close this great doxology by saying over and over **Amen**. **Amen** means truly, so be it, this is worthy of repetition for these ascriptions to God are the pinnacle of truth. As a close to this great heavenly scene of praise **the elders** solemnly and silently **fell down and worshipped**. This prostration symbolizes their total subjection to the Father and the Lamb as they take a humble position before Them.

Conclusion

By way of response to the Lamb being worthy to take and open the seven-sealed scroll the whole universe bursts into worship of the Lamb and the Father. The worship appropriately begins with the four living creatures who represent all animate creation and the twenty four elders who represent all redeemed humanity. Their response begins by falling down, prostrating themselves before the Lamb (5:8) and ends with the same prostrate position and worship

(5:14). The twenty-four elders are holding twenty-four harps and twenty-four golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints. The four and twenty-four all sing a new song of redemption in 5:9-10. The Lamb is worthy of this new song for three reasons: 1) because He was slain, 2) because He redeemed them to God by His blood, and 3) because He has made them kings and priests to God. An incalculable number of angels join in a chant in 5:11-12 giving the slain Lamb a seven-fold praise for His divine attributes. Finally, every intelligent created thing adds a chant of four ascriptions in 5:13. The worship ends on a solemn note of truth in 5:14. This climax of praise gives rise just before the terrible seal judgments are about to be released upon the whole world. 2000+ years of grace have been given. Now judgment must come. The result of this judgment will be the salvation of an innumerable company of men from both Gentiles nations as well as the apple of God's eye, Israel.

ⁱ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 360.

ⁱⁱ William, R. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1935), 89.

ⁱⁱⁱ The twenty-four elders are mentioned twelve times in the Bible, all of which are in the Book of Revelation (4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4). Five times they are referred to as the "twenty-four elders", five times they are referred to as a group of "elders", and twice one of the "elders" comes forth from the others. It is implied that all twelve uses of the word "elders" in Rev 4-19 refer to the same group of twenty-four elders and not to a second group of elders. The "twenty-four elders" are described in chapter 4 as beings "clothed in white garments" and wearing "golden crowns on their heads" (4:4). Their location is in the heavenly throne room of God (4:2). They are in close proximity to the Lamb's throne seated on twenty-four thrones (4:4; 11:16). They also have a close association with the "four living creatures" yet are distinct from them (4:6, 9-10; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11; 14:3; 19:4). Their functions are "to fall down" before the One sitting on the throne (4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4), "to worship" the One sitting on the throne (4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4), to inform John the Apostle during his visions (5:5; 7:13ff), and to sing a momentous "new song" (5:9).

^{iv} William Barclay, *The Revelation of John: Vol 1* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977), 177.

^v **Psalm 141:2** May my prayer be counted as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering.

^{vi} Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992), 408.

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