

A man was walking through an art gallery when he came upon a painting of Jesus hanging on the cross, so he stopped to take a look at it. As he stared into the face of Jesus, so full of pain and agony, a guard at the art gallery tapped him on the shoulder. “Lower,” the guard said. “The artist painted this to be appreciated from a lower position.”

So, the man bent down, and from this lower position he observed new beauties in the painting not previously shown. “Lower,” said the guard. “Lower still.” The man knelt down on one knee and looked up into the face of Jesus. The new vantage point yielded new beauties to behold and appreciate.

But motioning with his flash light toward the ground, the guard said, “Lower. You’ve got to go lower.” The man now dropped down to both knees and looked up. Only then as he looked up at the painting from such a low posture could he realize the artist’s intended perspective. Only then could he see the full beauty of the Lord’s sacrifice on the cross.

This seems to be true of our own worship as well. Only as we position ourselves lower and lower in humility can we recognize more fully who God is and appreciate what He has done for us.

Last week, we saw this truth played out as we left off with the twenty-four elders circled around the throne humbly falling down in worship. If you recall, the Apostle John was in the throne room of God in heaven, and he watched as they cast their crowns before the throne and they said in one voice, **“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”** It was a scene filled with awe and wonder, praise and worship, and this morning we are continuing with the same scene in the throne room – nothing has changed, but amongst all the amazing colors, and the light of God’s glory, amongst the twenty-four elders and the heavenly beings which are beyond our imagination – in all this excitement, something new catches John’s eye – something in the hand of the One who sits on the throne.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 5, verse 1**. John says,

I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.

We are told by John that the One who sits on the throne, God the Father, had a book in His **right hand**. This is the image presented to John – God has a book.

The Greek word for **book** is *biblion*, and it's the same word for scroll, and since the use of scrolls was common in those early days, days before the use of books – scroll is more likely what is meant here. So, we will use the word “scroll” instead of book.

According to John, he sees a scroll, and this scroll has writing on the **inside and on the back**. Obviously, John could not be read the contents of scroll because it was rolled up, but he knew there was writing on both sides of it – on the inside and on the outside, and the scroll had **seven seals** on it. It may have looked something like we see in the slide.

In John's day, important legal documents were rolled up and sealed with a glob of wax to keep the contents private until some authorized person was allowed to break the seal and unroll the scroll. That was a common practice amongst the Jews and the Romans – a practice that would have been completely known to John and to the original readers in the Middle East.

So, what was this scroll and why seven seals instead of only one seal? There are a lot of ideas about the nature of this scroll, but the best I can tell it seems to be similar to a title deed, like a title deed to property, and for a little biblical history on title deeds, back in **Jeremiah 32**, the Lord told the prophet Jeremiah to purchase a field which was in the land of Benjamin. Jeremiah bought the field for seventeen shekels of silver, he signed the title deed, and then it was rolled up and sealed. That seems easy to understand, but what's interesting in this transaction with Jeremiah, is that there was also a second copy of the title deed – an unsealed copy which was accessible to anyone who wanted to read a description of the transaction without opening the sealed scroll.

Now, it's my understanding that sometimes instead of creating a second open copy of a title deed, one could write a brief summary of the transaction on the outside of the sealed scroll so that a person could know what the scroll was generally about without actually having to break the seal and unroll it. It's similar to a preview of a book or a trailer for a movie, and that's what I think is being described here, and in regard to the **seven seals**, according to Roman law, documents like a contract, a last will and testament, or a title deed were required to be sealed seven times.

So, this scroll seems to be a title deed of sort, which signifies God's rightful ownership of the universe, and it also contains His plan to deal with the affairs of the earth – a plan from long ago to condemn wickedness, to bring those who will repent to the Lord, namely the Jewish people, to reward righteousness, and to

establish the Lord's promised kingdom upon the earth. This makes sense to me, especially as we see God's plan being unfolded to us step by step beginning with the next chapter in the book of Revelation.

Well, the scene in the throne room continues and John hears a question about this scroll. Let's look at **verses 2 through 5**.

²And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" ³And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. ⁴Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; ⁵and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

God the Father wants to pass on the scroll like an inheritance – giving ownership to the rightful heir, and so the question is asked by an angel, "**Who is worthy to break its seals and open the scroll**" – but no one raises a hand. No one approaches the throne. The saints in heaven don't step up to the plate – they can't. The thousands upon thousands of angels don't make a move – for they can't either. There appears to be no one who has the right, who has the power, and who has the privilege to take this scroll – to take this title deed and break its seals to open it. There seems to be no one who is that special, and who is that worthy to come forward and take ownership of the universe.

Then we are told that John begins to **weep greatly**, meaning he wept and wept and wept – **but why?** Well, due to his reaction, it would seem that John had some idea about the nature of the scroll, he appears to know what it's about, and he understands that if the scroll is not opened – all is lost. John understands that the scroll must be opened if things are to be made right, if pain and suffering and death are to come to an end, and if paradise is to be restored. And maybe more importantly, if there is no one found worthy to open the scroll – **then what does that say about Jesus? What does that say about His claims? What does that say about His promises? What does that say about His sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection from the dead? What does it say to John who has placed his life and his hope entirely in the Lord?**

So, John is understandably distressed – this is huge for John, but then he is consoled by one of the **elders** for there is One, and only one, who is found worthy, and He is introduced as **the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah**.

The Lion of Judah – that is a title you may have heard before, and it's the symbol of a king taken from **Genesis 49:8-10**. We are told,

8“Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father’s sons shall bow down to you. 9“Judah is a lion’s whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? 10“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

God gave the scepter of rule to Judah. The tribe of Judah, beginning with King David, was the tribe of kings, and like a powerful lion who is on top of the food chain, the Jews expected a king who would rule like a majestic and menacing lion. They expected the Messiah to come from the royal blood line of David, the **root of David**, to destroy the ungodly and to devour its enemies, namely the Romans who had evaded their Promised Land. They expected their Messiah to be fierce and forceful, but when Jesus came during His earthly ministry – He wasn't like that. Jesus didn't act the way they expected Him to act, and that's one of the reasons why the Jews rejected Him.

In many ways, that's just as true for us as well. When the Lord does not meet our expectations, when He's not who we want Him to be, when He does not do what we think He should do, there is a tendency for us to become disappointed with Him, and if we are not careful – even doubt Him.

So, John hears the **Lion of Judah** is coming, and he likely expects to see a mighty, powerful, and majestic creature. This is the image of the One he expects to take the scroll, so let's see what happens. Look at **verses 6 and 7**.

6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. 7 And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

John hears about the Lion – but when he looks, he sees something completely different. To John's surprise – standing between the throne of God and the elders, John doesn't see a Lion – he sees a **Lamb** – a lamb that appears to have been **slain**. This Lamb had been led to slaughter, and yet, He still lives. He's still standing – so obviously, He's not an ordinary lamb. He's a Lamb that has overcome – overcome sin, overcome the power of Satan, and He has overcome the grave. This

is Jesus – the perfect, spotless Lamb of God, the sacrificial Lamb – the Lamb that God had personally sent to take away the sin of the world.

So, the Lamb that was slain is now the center of attention in the throne room – all eyes are now focused on Him. If we were to see a literal picture of this Lamb, it might gross us out, but this was the symbolic image of Jesus that John was presented with, and it gives us several things to think about.

When we consider symbols of power, we think of mighty beasts and birds of prey such as those that represent nations and sports teams, but here in this scene, the representative of the kingdom of heaven is a Lamb, representing humility, and gentleness, and sacrificial love.

We are told that the Lamb has **seven horns**. A two-horned lamb is a normal thing, but not a lamb with seven horns. Again, this is no ordinary Lamb, and obviously, Jesus is presenting Himself in a symbolic way to John. In the Bible, horns symbolize power, and the number seven represents fullness, so seven horns represent the fullness or the completeness of His power – meaning His power is unlimited. We are also told the Lamb has **seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God**, in other words, the Holy Spirit is Christ's agent sent forth into all the earth. He is ever present – always present. He sees all and He knows all.

So, to see Jesus fully, we need to see Him as both the Lion and the Lamb.

I was reminded of the line in “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” when Susan learned that Aslan, who represents the Lord in the story, was actually a great lion. *“Ooh” said Susan. “I’d thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion” ... “Safe?” said Mr. Beaver ... “who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”*

At His first coming, during His earthly ministry – Jesus came as a Lamb, but at His second coming – He’s a Lion, but He’s good.

Then the scene continues in the throne room, and we are told in **verse 8**,

When He had taken the book, 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.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, takes the scroll as an inheritance from the Father's right hand, which confirms His worthiness. Jesus had been slain, paying the full price for our sin debt. He is the only One who did that and the only One who could do that. Only He is able to remove the seals and to execute God's plan. The Father allows His Son to take the scroll, which symbolizes a transfer of ownership and sets the plan into motion.

When Jesus took the scroll, several things occurred. First the **four living creatures** and the **twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb**. Each of the elders was **holding a harp and golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints**.

That's a great visual picture for us as we are reminded our prayers reach the throne room of heaven; however, for the sake of context, I think these prayers are specifically related to God's plan to condemn wickedness, to bring lost people to repentance, to reward righteousness, and to establish the Lord's promised kingdom upon the earth.

Now if you noticed, when Jesus took the scroll, the crying stopped and the praising began. Let's look at **verses 9 and 10**.

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

At the beginning of this chapter, it was asked "**Who is worthy**" and now the answer is given in song. The twenty-four elders sing a **new song** – a gospel song, and in this song, we are told that Jesus is worthy because He was slain. Jesus went to the cross to pay our sin debt in full, He **purchased** us, He redeemed us with His **blood** because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. And not only that, He made us **priests** in the kingdom of God, and we will **reign** with Him. It's a gospel song packed with gospel truth. Jesus was worthy to take the scroll because in His love and in His obedience, He purchased us.

Little Johnny had spent hours building a small sail boat, crafting it down to the finest detail. He carried his new boat to the edge of the river and then carefully placed it in the water. How smoothly the boat sailed!

Little Johnny sat in the warm sunshine, admiring the little boat that he had built, but suddenly a strong current caught the boat and moved it far from his reach downstream.

Little Johnny ran along the riverbank as fast as he could, but his little boat soon slipped out of sight. All afternoon he searched for the boat without success. Finally, when it was too dark to look any longer, little Johnny sadly went home because he knew it would take a long time to build himself another boat. But what he didn't know was that downstream a man found his boat and took it to town where he sold it to a shopkeeper.

A few days later, on his way home from school, little Johnny spotted a boat just like his in the store window. When he got closer, he could see -- sure enough -- it was his!

Little Johnny hurried to the store manager: "Sir, that's my boat in your window! I made it!"

"Sorry, son, but someone else brought it in. If you want it, you'll have to buy it."

Little Johnny ran home and counted all his money and had exactly enough! When he reached the store, he rushed to the counter. "Here's the money for my boat." As he left the store, little Johnny hugged his boat and said, "Now you're twice mine. First, I made you and now I bought you."

In so many words, that's what Jesus did – He created us and then He bought us, and it prompted praise by the **twenty-four elders**, and rightly so because they represent the redeemed that were purchased by His blood, and then the praise spreads like wild fire. Let's pick up with **verse 11**.

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 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." 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." ¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

I don't want to dissect this passage for fear of turning this beautiful scene into a bunch of snippets – so as a whole, in this closing burst of praise, all the angels, all the saints – every creature in the universe, without exception, are joined together to worship the Lord, and this praise and worship seems to be prophetic in nature, as if John is given a sneak peek of the day at the end of history when all of creation bows down and every tongue will confess that **“Jesus Christ is Lord.”** It seems John gets to see the victorious celebration at the end before the plan is actually set into motion.

We are told that because of His sacrificial and finished work on the cross, Jesus deserves **to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing** – and consider the irony suggested in part by Warren Wiersbe.

Jesus left heaven to dwell upon the earth as a man. Jesus was born in weakness in a manger, He died in weakness on a cross, but He is the recipient of all power. He became poor, and yet He owns everything. Men laughed at Him, scoffed at Him, called Him a fool, suggested He was demon possessed, and yet He is the very wisdom of God. He hungered, and thirsted, and became weary like any other man, but now He possesses all strength. During His earthly ministry, He experienced humiliation as sinners ridiculed and mocked Him. They disregarded His kingship and dressed Him in a mock robe and a crown of thorns. But all of that has changed now. He is a conquering hero, the Lamb of God who was slain, He is the Lion of Judah – worthy to receive all honor and glory and blessing.

When I consider this chapter, I am reminded that just as Jesus took center stage in the throne room of heaven, He also has to take center stage in my life and in your life – for He alone is that worthy. In times of praise and worship, and yes, even in times of discouragement and doubt, we must not lose sight of who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

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