

Behold the Lamb

Revelation 5:1-14

Studies in Revelation #14

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There are some things so awe-inspiring and moving that they need no introduction. Two years ago on a speaking trip I visited Niagara Falls for the first time. After parking and walking down the street I began to hear and then feel the Falls. Then I saw the several stories high mist rising out of the water. Finally I got up the railing. I was speechless and it seemed most everyone else was too.

How much more so the scene before us in this text this morning? With John we held the throne in chapter 4 and now here we *Behold the Lamb*.

1. *The Weeping of John (vv. 1-4)*
2. *The Worthiness of Christ (vv. 5-10)*
3. *The Worship of Creation (vv. 2-3)*

The Weeping of John (vv. 1-4)

We begin with *weeping*. **Then I saw**; here is another vision given to John. He saw **in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne**—that is, God the Father according to chapter 4—**a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals** (v. 1). This echoes the imagery of the scrolls in the visions of the prophets Isaiah (Isa. 29) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 2). What is the **scroll** an image of? This is the word and will of God symbolized. And the fact that it is sealed not with just one seal, but seven, shows that this is a word and will that is complete and perfect. So here is everything God has planned and purposed for the history of

the world.

Then John sees another vision: **And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?”** Notice what the angel does not say. He does not say, “Who is available,” for if he did, there were thousands upon thousands of heavenly angels and attendants from whom one could step forward. He does not say, “Who is able to open this scroll,” for again, there were those like this **mighty angel** able to take pieces of wax off this scroll. No, he does not ask a question that can be answered by just anyone or anything, but he asks a specific question, **“Who is worthy?”** Are you?

Listen to what John says, **And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it** (v. 3). This is a comprehensive way of describing how bleak this situation was. To say heaven, earth, and under the earth is saying there is no place where anyone can be found who is worthy. What a powerful way for John to say to you and me, “You are not God.” He says to you and me, “You cannot enter my presence, take from my hand the scroll of my will, nor open it up and know the mysteries of the universe.” My friends, you are a creature not the Creator; you are a sinner not holy. And this is why John says, **I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it** (v. 4). John weeps because if the scroll is not opened the chaos in the world and the persecution against the church will not end; if no one is worthy God’s will and word to help us will not be executed.

The Worthiness of Christ (vv. 5–10)

This leads to the ceasing of weeping and the announcement of one who is worthy. **And one of the elders** whom we saw in chapter 4 worshipping God **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.”**

But I thought John said **no one** (v. 3) in all the universe could open the scroll?

How is this **Lion** able and worthy? He’s no animal, is he? He’s no mere creature, is he? We know who this is! This is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God equal in glory and majesty (Athanasian Creed §6) with the Father and the Spirit who came down from heaven to earth, who left eternity for time, who being infinite took on finitude by become a human being like us (John 1:14) in every way without sin (Heb. 4:15).

He’s called **the Lion of the tribe of Judah** because all the way back when the patriarch Jacob blessed his children, he described his son Judah like a lion and said that from him would come kings to rule Israel (Gen. 49:9). He’s not just another lion, another king, but **the Lion** from tribe of God’s people from which came David and all the kings. He is like David, being a man from David’s tribe, but he is more than a mere man, more then even Israel’s greatest King.

He’s called **the Root of David** (Isa. 53:2). Notice that. Although being born a thousand years after David he is the one who gave birth to David in the first place. If David is the tree then Jesus is the root from which that tree came. In other words, Jesus is worthy because he is the greatest king found in heaven, on earth, or

under the earth, but also because he is not from this creation; he is God.

And as this God-man, he **has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals** (v. 5). How? John sees another vision: **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** (v. 6). The Lion is the Lamb. The Victor is the Victim. The Strong One is the Sacrificed One. The One who gives life to all things as Creator becomes One by whose death new life is given. As we sing at Christmas Eve,

Glorious now behold him arise;
King and God and sacrifice.¹

Jesus Christ alone is worthy, brothers and sisters, because as perfect man and perfect God he accomplished God's will on the cross and in the empty tomb. This is why the elders and creatures in verse 9 say "**worthy are you...for** or **because you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God.**" And note that when verse 6 describes Jesus as the lamb of God, saying, **as though it had been slain**, the verb tense he uses is a perfect tense, signifying that Jesus continues to exist as the sacrificed lamb for our sins. Are you a sinner today? There is a sacrifice for your sins in Jesus. Do you continue to be a sinner today even as a believer? There is a perpetual sacrifice for your sins in Jesus!

¹ From the hymn, "We Three Kings of Orient Are."

And because our Lord is worthy, at his ascension he approached the heavenly throne worthily. As John says, therefore **he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne** (v. 7). Behold your Lord! Behold your Savior!

The Worship of Creation (vv. 8–14)

I began this sermon saying some things are so awe-inspiring that they leave us speechless. Here is the sacrifice of the Son our Savior, at which we sing,

What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?²

To *worship* our Savior in thankfulness we are helped by the angels in heaven. We can borrow their language in verses 8–14. As parents we teach our children how to act and speak properly. This past week at Costco the kids and I met this great elderly couple as we passed them in the aisle. I had to stop for something and they said something about kids and I said something back. The man was great. He said to Cyprian, “Now stand up straight, look me in the eyes, and tell me your name.” After he did the man said, “There you go!” God gives us the appropriate way to praise him in the example of the angels. As we pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

² From the hymn, “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.”

Notice something wonderful here about how God's Word is organized. We saw back in 4:8 that the four living creatures praise God. Then we saw in 4:9-11 that when they do the twenty-four elders follow suit. Now here in 5:8 we read that **the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders** praise the Lamb. In 5:11-12 it's not just **the living creatures and the elders** but also **the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands** that are praising the Lamb. Notice how the number of those worshipping is increasing? Finally in 5:13 John hears **every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them** praising **him who sits on the throne and...the Lamb**.

Notice their praise, which needs to be ours as well. We praise Christ for what he has done: **"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"** (5:9-10). And again in verse 12, **"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain."** What's the focus? The cross, which has ironically conquered. The cross, the cross, the cross, brothers and sisters, needs to be the theme of our preaching, our worshipping, our singing, our witnessing, and our living.

We praise Christ in every way we can with everything within us: **"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"** (5:12) How many ascriptions and

descriptions are there here? Seven, which is the number of completeness, perfection, and wholeness. After all that Jesus has done we give him all that could be given to him, all that could be said to him, and all that he deserves, but even this is woefully inadequate!

And we praise Christ as we praise the Father. Verses 13–14 bring us full circle. **No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it** (v. 3) but now that it has been revealed that only the Lion who is the Lamb is worthy **every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them** praise both the Father and the Son: **“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”** (v. 13)

And in the end this morning, like the hosts of heaven, at such a scene as this all we can do is to say “Amen,” fall down, and worship. And all God’s people say...Amen! Let us pray.