

Worthy is the Lamb  
Revelation 5  
Maundy Thursday 2019

*Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, <sup>4</sup> and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>5</sup> And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."*

*<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. <sup>8</sup> And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying,*

*"Worthy are you to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
<sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth."*

*<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice,*

*"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might  
and honor and glory and blessing!"*

*<sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,*

*"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"*

*<sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Are you ever confused by the state of the world around you? Do you ever wonder what God's plan is, if He really does have a plan? Do you ever wonder how long God will allow things to continue to go on the way they are before He intervenes to make things right, if He is planning to intervene at all?

The Apostle John and the early church were suffering and confused when God gave John the series of messages and visions that comprise the Book of Revelation. John was in exile on the Island of Patmos, a Roman prison island in the Mediterranean Sea. He was the last living Apostle, the others having been brutally killed. The church was about to face very intense persecution from the Emperor, who was already ratcheting up the pressure on the church. Meanwhile, many Christians had been expelled from their local synagogues, disowned by their families, fired from their jobs, expelled from their social circles, labelled as atheists or worse. They lived in a culture of rampant sexual immorality, idolatry, cruelty, and political corruption.

In Revelation 4, John was given a wonderful vision of God's heavenly throne room. This vision of God's heavenly throne is powerful and beautiful, a reminder that God has created all things and sustains all things and that He is on His heavenly throne. But what is God's plan for the world He created and His people whom He loves and has called to be His own? Is God going to protect and bless His own people and judge the world for its wickedness and its cruelty against them?

### I. **The Scroll, vv. 1-4**

As chapter 5 begins, the vision began in chapter 4 continues. John sees that God ("him who was seated on the throne") is holding a scroll in His right hand.

- a. **In the right hand of God** – The fact that the scroll is in God's right hand means that it's His; He wrote it.
- b. **Written on front and back** – This scroll is written on both sides, on the front and the back. This was very unusual. Scrolls were always blank on the back, for fear that writing on the back would destroy the writing on the front. So, this scroll is unique. It is completely full of writing. The only comparison we have to this scroll is in Ezekiel 2:8-10 *"But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you."*<sup>9</sup> *And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it.*<sup>10</sup> *And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe."*

In Ezekiel, the scroll with writing on the front and back was Ezekiel's ministry and message, and he had to eat it before he could preach it. It was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. Ezekiel's ministry had a message of judgment and woe for the people of God. What was the message on the scroll in God's hand in Revelation 5?

- c. **Sealed with seven seals** – Well, the last detail helps us understand more: The scroll was not only "written within and on back," but it was also sealed with seven seals. First and foremost, this tells us this scroll is incredibly important. Important scrolls would always be sealed, and sometimes they would be sealed twice, if they were vitally important. This scroll has seven seals, which is the number of divine completion and perfection.

This scroll, then, represents THE plans and purposes of God for His people and His creation, It's not just a message for a prophet, it is THE message of what God will do to fully and finally redeem His people and judge the world. G.K. Beale in his excellent commentary further says it is a covenantal inheritance scroll, so that whoever opens it not only know God's plans, but will carry out God's plans as God's covenant heir and king.

Think of it this way: In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve in His image and set them over His whole creation, They were the rulers over His creation and the heirs of His covenant promises. Life was good and the world was right, until they decided to rebel against Him. When Adam and Eve sinned, they plunged the world into chaos and death. God's covenant with Adam was broken, and the whole world suffered from its break, so God began unfolding His covenant of grace, the unfolding of the covenant of redemption, God's plan to redeem and restore what Adam's sin had lost and broken.

Don't glaze over and think this is all just religious talk that has nothing to do with your life. Everything you struggle with in your life is the result of the fall and is part of God's plan for redemption and restoration – your sin, your guilt, your shame, your loneliness, your tiredness, your sense of frustration and futility, your anger and your self-pity, your weakness and sickness, the death of your loved ones, your fear and uncertainty, your sense of inadequacy, your addictions, your bad dreams and your failed aspirations, your frustration with the violence and division and corruption of the world around you – all of it comes flowing from the brokenness of creation that came as a result of sin and the breaking of God's covenant with Adam. And all of it is tied up in God's redemptive plans and purposes written on that scroll.

And so the question that rings out loud and clear through heaven and earth is a question of the utmost importance: "*Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?*" Who is worthy to receive and unfold the plan to redeem and restore all that Adam broke in his Fall? Who is worthy to inherit the covenant and execute the final redemption and reign over all things for good forever? This is THE question, and it leads to an exhaustive search, a search throughout heaven and on the earth and under the earth, a search that finds no one, a fruitless and empty and frustrating search.

"*No one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.*" No one. Some of us are reading through the Bible this year, and we've been plowing our way through the Old Testament for months now, and at times, it's honestly quite depressing and overwhelming. I've read through the Bible many times, but I still honestly find long stretches of the Old Testament quite bleak. I just keep thinking, "Lord, none of this is working. None of it. At all."

And that's precisely what we're supposed to think, because in many ways the whole Old Testament is the story of this exhaustive search, and in many ways the conclusion of the Old Testament narrative is simply this: "No one is worthy."

John's response to the fruitless search is to weep. And he doesn't just weep gently, but he weeps loudly. He is in utter despair, as he should be, until he is told by one of the elders, "*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.*"

## **II. The Lion & the Lamb (vv. 5-7)**

This is finally the good news John has been waiting to hear. Someone has qualified! But who?

### a. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah

John is told to “behold the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” He is the mighty king from Judah’s tribe. In Genesis 50:10, Jacob prophesied about Judah:

*“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
until he comes to whom it belongs,  
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”* (ESV, footnote)

Now, finally, some 1,800 years later, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah has come.

- i. **The Root of David** – This Lion of the Tribe of Judah is described at the Root of David. This is interesting, because elsewhere He is called the Branch. Isaiah 11 combines the imagery of both root and branch. Isaiah 11:1 says, *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”* Then, verse 10 says, *“In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”* Clearly, this Lion of the Tribe of Judah is also the Branch and Root described in Isaiah 11, one who is a descendent of David, arising after the Davidic line has been cut down, but who also pre-dates Jesse, the father of David, and is his source as his root.
- ii. **Who Has Conquered** – The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David has conquered. The word for “conquered” here means to overcome and get the victory after a struggle.
- iii. **So that He can open the scroll** – It is the fact that the Lion of Judah has conquered that makes Him qualified to open the scroll. The struggle He was engaged in was a struggle to become qualified to open the scroll, and He has won that battle. So that now, He can open the scroll.

### b. A Little Lamb

What happens next is very unusual, shockingly unexpected, really. Here, I’m not thrilled with the ESV’s rendering of verse 6, which doesn’t follow the word order of the Greek or the exact meaning of the original. The Christian Standard Bible is better here: *“Then I saw one like a slaughtered lamb standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders.”* The New English Translation (NET) is even better still: *“Then I saw standing in the middle of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the middle of the elders, a Lamb that appeared to have been killed.”* Even more striking, the word for “lamb” here means “little lamb.” It’s used over 20 times throughout the Book of Revelation to describe Jesus, but just once outside of Revelation in the whole New Testament, in John 20, where Jesus, restoring Peter, tells him to “feed my Lambs.” So, it’s a word that normally refers to a helpless lamb, and here is a helpless little lamb that looks slaughtered.

This is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who has conquered!

- i. **Looking Slain/Slaughtered** – This is a vivid image – looking like it had been slaughtered, like a sacrificial animal.
- ii. **Seven Horns and Seven Eyes** – And yet this little lamb who has been slaughtered has great power and authority and knowledge. He has not just two horns but seven horns, representing perfect, divine power and authority, He is omnipotent. He has seven eyes, representing perfect, divine sight and knowledge. He is omniscient. That’s why He can stand in the midst of the throne, because He is GOD Almighty, and yet He is also the conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Slaughtered Little Lamb of God.

In fact, not only does the Lamb carry the mark of perfect divine power and knowledge, but for the rest of Revelation, John will not be able to mention God the Father without also mentioning the Lamb:

In verse 13, the praise of all creation is given “*to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.*”

In 6:13, on the Great Day of Judgment, people call out “*to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.*”

In 7:10, a great multitude from every tribe, tongue, people and nation offer praises, saying, “*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*”

In 21:22, we get to the New Jerusalem, and we’re told, “*And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*”

And so it goes for the remainder of this book: God the Father and God the Son can be distinguished from one another but not separated from one another.

- iii. **He Took the Scroll** – The Lamb who was slain and has conquered approaches God the Father, and He takes the scroll from His right hand. This part of the heavenly scene was anticipated in Daniel 7:

*“I saw in the night visions,  
and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a son of man,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
<sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,*

*that all peoples, nations, and languages  
 should serve him;  
 his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
 which shall not pass away,  
 and his kingdom one  
 that shall not be destroyed. (vv. 13-14, ESV)*

So, we can see that this Lion of the Tribe of Judah, this Lamb who was Slain, is also the Son of Man, who reigns forever.

### **III. The Praise (vv. 8-14)**

As soon as the Lamb takes the scroll from the hand of God the Father, we hear three concentric circles of beautiful, spontaneous praise.

#### **a. From the 4 Living Creatures & 24 Elders (the Church)**

The first to praise the Lamb are the mysterious four living creatures surrounding His throne and the church, in the form of 24 elders, who represent the 12 Tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles of the Lamb.

##### **i. Each holding a harp & a golden bowl of incense**

Each of the 24 elders is holding a harp and a golden bowl of incense. We misunderstand harps and their purpose in the Bible. I like how Don Carson explains the harps in his sermon on this passage: The harp is the instrument of joy in the ancient world, much smaller and more portable and more for accompanying singing than our modern harps. In that way, the harp is more like our banjo. It's an instrument of joyful celebration. No one can be sad and gloomy while someone is playing a banjo, and you can't imagine playing a dirge on a banjo. The fact that each elder has a harp is a symbol of the incredible joy every believer has in heaven.

They also each hold a golden bowl of incense, which represents the prayers of the saints. Our prayers may be weak and wandering, but Christ hears the prayers of His children, in His wisdom and power.

##### **ii. Fell down before the Lamb**

The 24 elders fall down before the Lamb. They are not upright and proper; they are prostrate and truly worshipful.

**iii. Sang a new song:** Then, they sing. God's redeemed people always sing, for redeemed people are a singing people:

**I. Worthy are You to take the scroll and open its seals:** They are so thankful that someone has been found worthy to open the scroll, to unfold

God's plan. What has made the Lamb worthy? How has He conquered?

2. **For You were slain, and by Your blood Your ransomed** – The Lamb who has been slain was victorious and is worthy because He was slain, not despite the fact that He was slain. He was slain as a ransom sacrifice, to ransom people for God by His blood. People in the ancient world were very familiar with ransom and redemption. 60% of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves, and people could end up in slavery if they were captured in war or if they were in debt. Debt-slavery was perhaps the most common cause of becoming enslaved in the Roman Empire. If you ended up enslaved due to debt, a kind friend or relative could redeem you and set you free by paying a ransom price to a god at a Temple. The priests would then take their percentage and make the payment to the debt-holder, and it would be said that the god had set the slave free, had ransomed or redeemed them. This is some of the cultural background of this language.

Christ set us free from bondage to sin and death, from our slavery, by shedding His blood as a ransom to set us free and buy us for God.

3. **People from every tribe and language and people and nation** – Who did the Lamb ransom by His blood? People from every tribe, every language, every people, and every nation. This is why our mission task must be complete before Jesus will come again, because His church must be complete, and He must receive all the people whom He has ransomed. It's not possible for someone to be ransomed and redeemed and to remain in slavery, and so that means that Jesus has people who belong to Him, who need to hear the Gospel so they can believe in Him, in every tribe, in every people group, among every language and nation in the world.
4. **And have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God** – And now that we are ransomed by His blood, what does He make of us? A kingdom and priests. We are all priests of God in the redeemed New Covenant church, for we all pray to God on behalf of the world, with direct access to His throne, and we all speak God's word to the world. What a calling!

5. **And they shall reign on the earth** – Believe it!

#### **b. From a countless multitude of angels**

After the Lamb receives His praise from the church, the angels surrounding His people break forth in song.

- i. **numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands** – These are millions and millions of mighty angels, who Hebrews tells us are ministers sent to serve those who inherit salvation.

- ii. **Worthy is the Lamb who was slain** – They also sing of the worthiness of the Lamb who was slain
- iii. **to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might** – This is what Jesus as the Conquering Lion-Lamb receives from God the Father
- iv. **and honor and glory and blessing** – This is what Jesus receives from the praises of His people, the angels, and all creation.

**c. From all creation**

And then, it is not enough for Jesus to be praised only in His church and only by the angels. By the end, Jesus will be praised by every creature in heaven and on earth!

- i. **every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them** – In the end, when Jesus returns in power and glory, ALL will see Him and kneel and praise Him!
- ii. **To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb**
- iii. **be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!**

**d. Back to the 4 Living Creatures & 24 Elders**

- i. **the four living creatures said, “Amen!”** – The greatest angelic beings in the universe respond to the universe of praise by saying AMEN!
- ii. **and the elders fell down and worshiped.** – And back to the church, as they fall down and worship.

I get so excited when I read this chapter. I cannot wait to get to that Great Day when we will gather around the throne and sing with perfect joy! And then I am reminded that every Lord’s Day when we gather together here to praise King Jesus, we are getting a foretaste, a sample of that praise. Why would I ever want to be anywhere else?

This world is surely full of trouble and turmoil, and our lives are surely sometimes overwhelmed with suffering and sin and longing. But King Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Lamb who was slain, the One who has conquered and who is worthy to open the scroll and to receive our praise! The more we focus on Him and worship and adore Him, the more we see things rightly and long for the right things. This shapes our hearts with joy and faith and a truly unconquerable HOPE!