

The Apocalypse | Finding Composure in the Unveiled Christ

“The Worth of the One”

Revelation 5

5.16.21

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. ² And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. ⁴ Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; ⁵ and 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."

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. 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. 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."

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.

We've been looking at the Book of Revelation – the Apocalypse or Unveiling of Jesus Christ. We've seen that this is a deeply pastoral book – that it speaks to a church in need, a church facing intense opposition. Some were wondering if believing in Jesus Christ was really worth it. It didn't seem to be working and far from being “#blessed” some of these young Christians seemed much worse off than they were before believing the basic message of Christianity.

So, the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, peels back the curtain and shows what's happening behind the scenes. The disciples had been there when, some 40 days after the resurrection, Jesus went up, into another realm (into heaven) and all the earth was under His feet... They saw that from below.

And now they get a glimpse of that from ABOVE, not from the sending side but from the receiving side.

The church in need... the church under attack...and deeply discouraged and even doubting to the point of deconstructing their faith, leaving their First Love and becoming lukewarm – that disheartened church needs to see from Heaven's perspective what happened when Jesus Christ ascended into heaven.

What difference does the ascension make? It's in the creeds – “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father” – but what does that mean when the fallen-ness of this world is all I can see? What does the ascension do to help Christians keep on believing and to help not-yet-Christians BEGIN believing?

Let's look at the other half of this vision of worship we began to see last week – a worship service that takes place right in the Throne Room of God:

- 1) What is the Book?**
- 2) What's Required to Open It?**
- 3) What Happens When It's Opened?**

This second part of the worship service begins with an observation from the narrator: “I saw in the right hand of Him who sits on the throne, a BOOK” – what IS that Book?

Well, whether a book or scroll doesn't seem much to matter. The fact that it's written on both sides seems to point out that it's FULL and totally complete – no one can add to it.

As for the contents and significance of the Book – we can think of any number of important books in the Hebrew Bible. Some of the prophets are given books. Ezekiel is given a book (2-sided) and has to eat it. He and Zechariah see flying books/scrolls.

Jeremiah (CH 36) has to take dictation from God and write a book. Isaiah also takes dictation on a scroll and is later told that “the sky will be rolled up like a scroll” (34.4: as in the hymn, “It Is Well with My Soul”) The kings of Israel were supposed to always carry a book with them, the Book of Torah, reminding them that they were also accountable to the Law – they were NOT to be a law to themselves.

I think THIS Book/Scroll (Rev 5) goes back even further to the time of Moses from Exodus CH 24. There are so many parallels in the two scenes.

Moses goes up on the Mountain to worship with the Israelite elders. They're given an apocalypse, a glimpse into heaven where they look upward through that crystal sea, we saw last week and they see God through the sapphire pavement (23.10) "and (from below) they saw God and ate and drank and yet He did not stretch out His hand against them..."

And Moses is to read the Book of the Covenant to the people and He does. And the people reply, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" And, of course, the rest of the Hebrew Bible is the story of how the people of Abraham, the people of Moses, the people of the Book – it's the story of how they kept the Book of the Covenant and their promise to obey it ALL.

As you well know... it didn't work out like they promised. They were to obey where Adam had failed. Adam and Eve (i.e. humanity) were to be the rulers of God's creation. As kings and queens they were supposed to keep the Book with them and were supposed to rule as the Book instructed.

But as the first humans failed... so even God's chosen nation, the Jewish people, also failed and yet God doubled-down, as we might say – God promised to put a descendent of King David, a real human being, a Jewish Man on the throne of all creation. God would share His throne with a Jewish Man – someone who would succeed where Adam had failed and where the Israelites failed to keep the agreement/covenant.

And now – that Book with all God's instructions and all God's indelible plans for the eradication of evil and the plan to reclaim and reNEW all of creation... the Book meant to be opened by humanity and then by God's chosen nation – it was time for that Book to be opened by a Jewish Man who had totally trusted God and obeyed God's commands... but NO ONE could be found.

John sees that the glorious plan God has for His universe... the promises to fill the universe with MAGIC – to fill everything with His splendor/glory as the water cover the seas (Hab 2.14) – to fix all that is broken... Frodo asks Gandalf: "Is everything sad going to come untrue?" and John sees NO ONE who can make it happen, no one who simply lived and believed as God called humanity and the Jews to live and trust Him... "No one is righteous," said St Paul (quoting Ps 14/53), "not even one." (Rom 3.10)

And John weeps. Humanity and the whole creation are lost. God's plan to eliminate evil and to enthrone humanity (2 Pet 1.4), to put a truly good/just Jewish King (Ps 72) over all creation is lost... ALL IS LOST.

And that's when one of the ancient ones, a royal priest, a worship leader, an elder comes to John's side with the most encouraging words John had ever imagined, "Stop weeping; BEHOLD! The Lion...of David's tribe...the Royal Tribe of Judah has overcome so as to open the book of God's plan and it's seven seals..."

The seven seals ensure: no unqualified, unworthy person can do this. Only One who has overcome so completely and decisively – SEVEN locks.

And when John looks, between the throne and the elders, a Mediator, the Lion...but...it's a Lamb.

And it turns out the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lion overcame by becoming a Lamb. He comes forward to say, "Father, I have done all that Adam failed to do...all that My Abrahamic brethren promised to do but DID NOT..."

And the Lion who became a Lamb and was slain (standing as slain) – a Lamb with total power (seven horns) and complete insight and knowledge whose eyes are the Seven Spirits of God – "He came and took the Book from the right hand of Him who sits on the throne"

What complete audacity...except ... it's the Father's good pleasure for this Lion/Lamb to share the throne and everyone in the Thrones Room sees it starting with the Four Living Creatures and then the Royal Priests (Ex 19.6) with their worship instruments and their golden bowls of incense (the prayers of God's people) – everyone sees that this is NOT audacity – it's only fitting.

This is the One of whom the Father previously testified, "THIS is My Beloved Son, in whom I take great delight!"

And the seraphim and elders burst into a New Song for a New Creation (Isa 42.9-10). They praise the Lion for becoming a Lamb and conquering NOT by power but by weakness "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

He conquers sin and guilt by being charged with my crimes and... by DEATH He defeats death.

He fulfilled the Book of the Covenant and He takes our humanity right into the Presence of God... He's seated, a New Adam, the Root of David, a Jewish Man who is unlike any of us in that He is worthy...righteous. He conquers like a Lion by dying as a sacrificial Lamb. He obeyed IN MY PLACE and DIED AS MY SUBSTITUTE.

He takes the Promises to Israel and extends them, universalizes them, to every tribe, tongue, people and nation. He's come to make Jews and Gentiles alike into a Kingdom of Priests.

God is sharing His throne with US.

And then...as with a single voice (another reference to Exodus 24 – where the Israelites told Moses, “WE will obey!”) but now with one voice a hundred million angels singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

Seven virtues He's worthy to receive and then to distribute as He wills to anyone who believes and anyone who overcomes – whoever trusts Him and walks, humble, like a lamb, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus..."

Would you succeed in this life?... Would you like to overcome? Do you want to become fit to reign with God forever? Trust in the Lion who gave up His rights...who died to His own will (Luke 22.42), who fell like a grain of wheat into the ground and thus became infinitely fruitful (John 12.23-26).

We think that getting is the way up. We think that personal freedom (whichever weird way we define that) we think HOLDING ON TO STUFF AND TO MY WAY leads to greatness and it's just the opposite... It's a NEW song!

And finally, everyone will recognize – “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.’ And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.”

Now, let me close with what this all means – this reverse view of the Ascension of Christ (BTW – Ascension Day was this past Thursday) – What does this mean for the world, for us as a church and for you personally?

We go through this same pattern – in worship and in life again and again.

We ask the question – who is worthy? And while we're tempted to say, “This athlete” or “that celebrity” or who... Mother Theresa?

Evil will overcome everything and the world will self-destruct UNLESS a human being does what we are supposed to do. The great plan of God to save the planet will not be fulfilled by anyone but a Covenant Keeper and NO ONE has kept the covenant but...One, Jesus Christ.

We ought to weep at that. We ought to take so seriously our own complicity in the world's undoing... our selfishness... our refusal to trust God... our posturing as lions... and grasping for

what's MINE, MINE, MINE – that ought to make us weep. When we see the mess we're making of the world... the environment, the oceans, the violence... our own prayerlessness... we ought to weep. If we do – we'll be comforted.

Third, we should listen to our elders (isn't that what your mom told you?) Here, the elder says, "Behold, the Lion who overcame by becoming a lamb..."

Whenever, we think that we ought to march right up to that throne and take what's mine – we ought to see – "Uh, uh...not Mother Theresa or your grandmother or the Pope or Moses or anyone (certainly not I!); no one is worthy but One.

Give up thinking YOU are worthy – high self-esteem won't make you right with God and won't save the planet – ONLY THE ONE who did indeed obey all the Law and kept the covenant.

Fourth, see the Great Paradox of the Kingdom – that weeping leads to joy; self-denial leads to fulfillment; commitment leads to true freedom and the way to overcome like a lion is to give oneself away like a lamb. Whoever loses his life will find it. It's a new song – the world won't sing it until it's too late. You can only sing it by faith.

Last, when you see Him – when you come to Christ by faith – when you behold our humble God... you'll worship – "worth-ship" you'll ascribe worth to the One who's worthy.

Worship is war. To sing the New Song admiring Him who's infinitely beautiful – this is how the church overcomes. We are first and foremost worshipers of the Worthy One.

The priests led the charge in the Battle of Jericho... Worship is war. When we gather and hear the story of "how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to church you are really listening-in to the secret wireless from our friends: that is why the enemy is so anxious to prevent us from going." (That's C.S. Lewis.)

Evangelism IS worship – we're simply admiring the One Worthy in the hearing of pre-Christians – we're bragging on Him; and we're calling others to behold our God and to come to Christ... We're singing the New Song and inviting others to join the chorus.

But first... WE worship. This is the way to overcome – to lose our lives for a few minutes together... as sheep, because the Lion conquers by becoming the Lamb. So let us, worship God.