

WORTHY IS THE LAMB

Revelation 5:1-14

Key Verse: 5:9

“And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.’”

For the last several weeks, we have considered the mystery of Jesus’ incarnation based on John 1:14a, **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** A most important reason he did so was to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Thus, the story that begins with Jesus’ incarnation continues with his death, resurrection, and exaltation. Dr. Billy Graham has said, “the Christmas message can be summed up in three tremendous events: a birth, a death, and the climax of human history.”¹ We can understand the full meaning of Jesus’ incarnation as we consider his final victory. We find this final victory portrayed gloriously in Revelation 5:1-14.

The setting of Revelation 4-5 is God’s throne in heaven. At the center of the throne is the Lamb who was slain. Together with the Father God, he receives the worship of all creation in a most glorious scene. This vision was given to the Apostle John while he was on the island of Patmos, exiled for his faith in Jesus. John was old and alone, and the churches he had invested his life in were struggling in many ways. Moreover, they were about to confront a time of severe persecution. To stand firm and overcome, they needed to see the vision of final victory. We all need the vision of God’s final victory. We face strong foes: the devil, and the power of sin and death. These invisible enemies work against us and sometimes defeat us. Though we say, “Merry Christmas,” it sounds lame. Today let’s see God’s final victory so that we may live a spirit-filled life, and bear good fruit. This chapter has three parts: God’s throne and a scroll (1-5), the Lamb at the center of the throne (6-10), and worship of God the Father and of the Lamb (11-14).

First, God’s throne and a scroll (1-5). Verse 1 says, **“Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.”** Here we see the scene of God the Father

¹ https://twitter.com/Franklin_Graham/status/944023773161902080

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sitting on a throne, holding a scroll. God's throne is described in 4:3-6. The one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. These precious gems signify the luminous, brilliant color which emanate from God's presence and display his splendor and majesty. No one can describe God's presence fully. Apostle Paul said about God, **"...who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see"** (1Ti 6:16). From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God, which is the Holy Spirit.² There is also a sea of glass, clear as crystal. When we see this scene of God's throne, it is amazing, mysterious, majestic, glorious and awesome.

Though we don't see God's form, there is a right hand that holds a scroll. This scroll tells of God's final victory and can be opened only by someone properly authorized. Then John saw a mighty angel proclaim in a loud voice: **"Who is worthy to break the seals and to open the scroll?"** (2) No one in all creation dared to come forward (3). When John saw this, he wept and wept (4). Why? The early church was suffering from persecution, and John was suffering, too. God's final vindication seemed to be postponed. Would God's enemies oppress them continually? Would their suffering never end? When he thought about this reality, he grieved so much that his tears were like a fountain. At the same time, they were his prayer to God. Then one of the elders said to him, **"Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals"** (5). The titles, **"The Lion of the tribe of Judah"** and **"the Root of David,"** are from the prophecies of Jacob and Isaiah (Gen 49:9-10; Isa 11:1,10). They foretell the coming of the Messiah, a conquering King who would defeat the enemies of God and puts them under his feet.

Thus far in the vision, the point is made that only the Messiah, could open the scroll. The Messiah's coming was promised and prophesied from the Fall of man. Jesus fulfilled all that God had foretold. Jesus is the promised Messiah. Jesus is God's final word to mankind and the Savior and Judge God appointed (Heb 1:1-2a). **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved"**

² Revelation presents the Holy Spirit as one person (3:6,13), yet "seven spirits" (cf. 3:1; 4:5, etc.), which represent perfection, and "seven lamps" (4:5) and "seven eyes" (5:6), which express his omnipresence and omniscience.

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(Ac 4:12). People say that there are many ways to salvation. But the Bible says that Jesus is the only way (Jn 14:6). Jesus alone has the right to judge all people (Jn 5:22). This judgment will be based on how we respond to Jesus. Jesus said, **“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life”** (Jn 5:24). On the other hand, those who do not believe will be condemned (Jn 5:29).

Second, the Lamb at the center of the throne (6-10). Verses 6-12 tell us how Jesus became the conquering Lion and why he is worthy of all worship. Surprisingly, Jesus is introduced as the Lamb who was slain. In Revelation, the word **“Lamb”** appears 27 times. It refers to a small or young lamb which is gentle, meek, and tender. Lambs never attack anything. We do not associate them with conquerors at all. Surprisingly, this Lamb stands at the center of the throne (6). Yet this is a very special Lamb. He has seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. The seven horns symbolize the fullness of his divine power. The seven eyes symbolize his omnipresence and omniscience—he is everywhere, and he knows everything. The seven spirits of God represent the Holy Spirit in all his perfection and fullness. To sum up, the Lamb is perfect in power and knowledge and is everywhere at once. He is beyond time and space, and we cannot fully understand him. This Lamb is at the center, encircled by four living creatures and twenty-four elders. These living creatures are described in terms that are both earthly and angelic; they are rather mysterious. But we know that they were created to praise God for his eternity, holiness, power, and majesty (4:6b-11; Isa 6:2-3). We don’t know who the twenty-four elders represent. Yes as the living creatures praise God, the elders fall down before him and worship him (4:9-11). This is the heavenly worship team.

What does the Lamb do? Look at verse 7. **“He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.”** This seems like a coronation ceremony in which the Lamb is given full authority from the Father God to execute what was written in the scroll (Dan 7:13-14). As soon as the Lamb had taken the scroll, the heavenly worshippers fell down before the Lamb. Just as they had worshiped God, so they now worshiped the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people (8). The Lamb is the answer to these prayers. Our prayers, offered through tears and sufferings, are very precious

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to God. He stores them in golden bowls to be answered in his own time and way. God hears and answers all our prayers through the Lamb.

In addition to reverent prayer, the worshipers offered a new song to the Lamb. Let's read verses 9-10. **"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."** This tells us some very important truths.

First of all, the basis of Jesus' worthiness is that he was slain (9a).

The word "slain" appears three times in this chapter (6,9,12). Why is it so important? What does it mean? The word "slain" means to be killed violently and without mercy. Lambs are most meek and gentle and do not need to be killed in such a way. But this Lamb was slain brutally. Isaiah 53:7a prophesied about the Messiah's death: **"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter...."** The Evangelist Philip explained that this is the good news about Jesus (Ac 8:35). The gospel accounts tell us that Jesus indeed died violently and brutally. First, Jesus was severely beaten and flogged. His skin hung in strips and blood flowed from many wounds. A crown of thorns was pressed onto his head, nails were driven into his hands and feet, and he was hung on a cross. He became an object of shame and contempt. A soldier pierced his side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out. Why was Jesus killed in such a way? This was God's will for him as an offering for man's sin (Isa 53:10a).

Here we need to understand how serious sin is. When Adam disobeyed God's command, God judged and punished him and all creation. To us it may seem to be too extreme and even unfair. But when we see the result of sin, we can understand why. Sin devastated Adam's family. His son Cain killed his brother Abel out of jealousy. His descendant Lamech committed murder and then boasted about it before his wives. Sin destroyed the image of God within people to the degree that everyone on earth was corrupt, violent, and wicked (Gen 6:5). Sin is like a fatal, incurable disease that only gets worse and worse. This is not just an ancient story, it is a reality for us today. We see that people are selfish, greedy, lustful, and proud. Many families are ruined because of these sins. Society is filled with people who do evil and wicked things. It

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seems there is no way to solve this. Is there no way? God made a way. How? It is through the sacrifice of the Lamb.

We need to understand why this sacrifice was the only way. God is holy, just and righteous. He never condones or ignores sin. Sin must be justly punished. **The wages of sin is death** (Ro 6:23a). So, sinners must die for their sins. What is worse, death is not the end; after death comes judgment (Heb 9:27), and eternal condemnation (Rev 21:8). This is God's righteous justice. However, God is also love. He loves people so much because he made us in his own image. How could he reconcile his justice and his love? That was his dilemma. There is a story of a king who was righteous, loving and generous. One day he found that someone had devastated his kingdom's economy. For his people's good, he issued a decree that whoever had done this must have his eyes plucked out. Sometime later, the culprit was discovered. It was an unintentional act of the beloved crown prince. The king was in a dilemma. If he did not keep his own decree, his kingdom would be corrupted by injustice. But keeping the decree meant blinding the crown prince. After much agonizing, he found a way. He offered one of his own eyes to be plucked out in place of one of the prince's. Then both would still have one eye. It was a painful reconciliation of justice and love.

God's story is infinitely deeper than this story. We can never understand the depth of God's holiness, justice and love with human reason. But we are told about it in the Bible. Romans 5:8 says, **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** To redeem people from their sins, a perfect sacrifice was required. This was anticipated in the Old Testament. Sacrifice lambs had to be one-year old males without blemish or defect. Nevertheless, they were insufficient to atone for human sin. When Christ came into the world he said: **“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will my God’”** (Heb 10:5-7). Jesus voluntarily came into the world to do God's will. He offered himself as a sin offering to God. He became the perfect sacrifice (Heb 9:14). By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Heb 10:14). In this way, Jesus reconciled God's justice and love perfectly and brought honor and glory to his Father God.

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What, then, is the result of his sacrifice? First, with his blood, Jesus purchased for God people from every tribe and language and nation (9b). Though there are so many ethnicities, languages and cultures in the world, bondage to sin, death and the devil is a reality in all of them. But Jesus paid the price to set us free by shedding his precious blood. This grace is freely given to anyone who believes, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, or social status (Gal 3:28). Through Jesus we can experience a new life, heavenly joy, peace and freedom. We become the children of God, who have intimate fellowship with him, calling, “Father...Daddy!” Wow! What amazing blessings Jesus gives us! When we think of this, we have no reason to be grumpy or to complain. We can always be thankful to God from our hearts.

Second, Jesus made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God (10). Those who believe in Jesus have a new identity as a kingdom and priests, and a mission to serve our God. There is no nationalistic element in this identity. All believers are a kingdom and priests. We have a great privilege to serve our God without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before him all our days (Lk 1:74-75). This gives us meaning and joy. In the future, we will reign on the earth (2Ti 2:12). We will all be royal rulers with our Lord Jesus Christ. What great privileges! How should we respond?

Third, worship of God the Father and the Lamb (11-14). We see the circle of worshipers expanding in the remaining verses of this passage. Verse 11 says, **“Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.”** There were too many angels to count. They joined in the worship, forming a huge chorus in beautiful harmony. They were saying, **“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”** (12) “Worthy” means having high “worth” or merit. The Lamb fully deserves this worship, which is a sevenfold tribute to his deity. We can find no hint of mere duty in the worshipers. They worship willingly and joyfully. Worthy is the Lamb to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!

In verse 13, the circle of worshipers expands to include every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in

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them. They were saying, **“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”** This is a universal song of praise from all creatures in every part of creation. The wolf and the lamb form a duet to praise God. The lion and the calf combine their “roar” and “moo” in a beautiful harmony. They worship both God the Father and the Lamb. The four living creatures respond, **“Amen.”** The elders respond by falling down and worshipping (14). What about us? We also should worship the Father and the Lamb in a perpetual offering of thanksgiving and praise.

How can we do that? There are only two imperative verbs in this passage, and they both occur in verse 5: **“Do not weep!”** and **“See.”** We need to lift up our eyes from the pains, trials and sufferings we confront to see the glorious vision of the Lamb. While preparing this message, I found that I was weeping in the corner of my heart because of several beloved brothers who left our ministry, the fragmenting of some relationships among Chicago area UBF members, and concerns about my children. But as I heard the words, **“Do not weep!”** and **“See”** I could lift up my eyes to the Lamb who was slain in heavenly glory. My tears were wiped away and a sense of victory came into my heart. Later, a brother who had left our ministry a few years ago contacted me. He found peace with God and is very grateful for the influence of UBF ministry in his life. Then I was reminded how the Lord has restored a sense of love and unity among Chicago area chapters through this year’s Easter conference and a blessed Christmas worship service. And I remembered that in 2017 my daughter Sarah married godly man and was blessed. Let’s lift up our eyes to see the Lamb who was slain in everlasting glory. May the Lord give you a sense of victory, now and throughout 2018!