

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.’”

The book of Revelation largely reveals who Jesus Christ is (1:1). In chapters 1 and 5, Christ is at the center. Chapter 1 reveals the glorified Christ among the lampstands. Chapter 5 is a coronation ceremony for Christ in which he receives power and authority to carry out God’s judgment and redemption. The rest of what happens in Revelation hinges on this glorious event. The significance of this event cannot be overstated, for it tells of the restoration of God’s rightful reign over the world.

After creating the world, God gave the right to govern it to the first man, Adam. When Adam fell into Satan’s temptation and sinned against God, Satan became the prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Ever since then, godless people have seized power and ruled: Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Genghis Khan.... They used deception and ruthless power to do as they pleased and forced their will on others. They were devoid of mercy, truth and justice. In fact, they were all agents of Satan. Their common factors are that they failed, they died, and their kingdoms have disappeared. The most serious problem of mankind is that the rightful ruler is not reigning over the world. Under the oppression of devilish rulers lawlessness abounds, wickedness becomes normal, and people suffer injustice. Chapter 5 tells us that only Jesus Christ is worthy to rule the world. And he will. He establishes true justice and peace and reigns forever in glory. The promise of his coming reign gives us a sense of victory and true hope that inspires godly living. Let’s visualize Christ’s coronation with the eyes of faith and worship him.

First, worthy to open the scroll (1-7). 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.” The words “I saw” are repeated three times in this chapter and 35 times in Revelation. John is an eyewitness of visual images which God revealed to him. These images express gospel truth in visual forms. They engage our imaginations in a way that helps us grasp spiritual reality. The imagination is a God-given organ of learning. Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer illustrates the importance of the imagination with a story: *Two stonemasons were hard at work. When asked what they are doing, the first said: “I am cutting this stone in a perfectly square shape.” The other answered: “I am building a cathedral.” Both answers are correct, but it takes imagination to see that you are building a cathedral.* Imagination is part of our humanity. Yet if governed by our sinful nature, imagination creates illusion. This is why our imaginations should be sanctified by the word of God as we study the Bible.

What did John see? His vision shifts from the throne to the scroll in the right hand of God. This scroll with writing on both sides, sealed with seven seals, resembles ancient Roman wills or contract deeds. On the inside were the detailed contents; on the outside was a brief summary or label. It was sealed with seven wax seals, which bore the author’s insignia. Such scrolls could not be legitimately opened without the owner’s authorization. What was in the scroll in God’s right hand? It contains his decree of judgment and redemption which will unfold systematically.

Then John saw a mighty angel proclaim in a loud voice: “Who is worthy to break the seals and to open the scroll?” (2) The voice was so strong that it went throughout the heavens, the earth and even under the earth (3). It was a call for a worthy champion to come forward, one who could take the scroll and carry out its decrees to judge Satan and redeem the people of God. Though the open challenge went out to all creation, no one came forward. The angels Gabriel and Michael dared not approach. The heroes of faith Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, the apostles remained silent. When John saw this, he wept and wept (4). John’s tears represent the tears of all mankind. They are the tears of Adam and Eve, driven out of the garden, burying their first son Abel in the cursed ground. They are the tears of the people of Israel, as they sat by a river in Babylon, harassed by their captors, after losing

everything due to their sin of idol worship. They are the tears of all people who suffer from the devastating effects of sin, the cold reality of death, and the devil's torment. If no one opened the scroll, there would be no remedy for mankind at all. We would suffer endlessly without vindication or hope.

When John thought about this reality, he grieved--tears ran like a fountain. This is the only time in Scripture that tears are seen in heaven (7:17; 21:4). 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). There was just one person in all creation who could open the scroll. Who is he? He is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Gen 49:9-10). The lion's image is power to rule. He is the "king of the jungle." No other can oppose him. People long for this kind of ruler, who is strong and mighty enough to protect them from all evil. He is also "the Root of David" (Isa 11:1,10; 22:16), that is, a rightful heir to the throne in King David's line. In a word, he is the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. He has triumphed and can open the scroll and its seven seals. Verse 6 tells us how he could triumph.

Verse 6a says, "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders." Surprisingly, John saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain. This is a striking paradox. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the champion of God's people, appeared as a slaughtered Lamb, who was standing at the center of the throne. The word "Lamb," referring to Jesus, appears 33 times in Revelation (NIV). The Greek word refers to a small, young lamb which is gentle and meek. Lambs never attack anything. They are not conquerors. 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 (6b). The seven horns symbolize the fullness of his divine power. The seven eyes stand for his omnipresence and omniscience—he is everywhere and knows everything. The seven spirits of God represent the Holy Spirit in all his 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. 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." Now the Lamb is given authority from the Father God

to carry out what was written in the scroll (Dan 7:13-14). This is the awesome coronation ceremony of the Lamb who was worthy to take the scroll.

Second, worthy to be worshiped (8-14). As the Lamb takes the scroll, the scene changes drastically. John's tears cease. Hymns of praise and worship, or doxologies, begin to burst forth from the entire universe in accelerating waves, reaching a grand climax. Two doxologies in chapter 4 were addressed to the Creator God. Now two new doxologies arise that focus on the Lamb, followed by a final doxology directed toward both the Creator and the Lamb. The point is that the Lamb is worshiped together with the Creator God.

The doxologies in chapter 5 come from three different groups of worshipers. The first group are the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (8a). As soon as the Lamb took the scroll, they all fell down before him. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people (8b). When believers are persecuted, all we can do is pray. Sometimes our prayers seem insignificant. But God hears our prayers, stores them up in golden bowls, and judges accordingly. In fact, through the Lamb God hears and answers all our prayers.

In addition to reverent prayer, worshipers offered a new song to the Lamb. In the history of God's salvation work, new songs were offered for epic events. Christ's redemption of all creation is the most epic event in history. What are the words to this new song? 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 new song tells us deep truths.

Christ is worthy to be worshiped because he was slain (9a). The word "slain" appears three times in this chapter (6,9,12). It 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 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..." (Isa 53:7a). The gospels tell us that Jesus died violently. Jesus was severely beaten, flogged, and hung on a cross. A soldier pierced his side with a spear, and blood

and water flowed out. Why? This was God's will for him as an offering for man's sin (Isa 53:10a). These days many people take sin lightly. But sin is a fatal spiritual disease. It is much more serious than coronavirus. Sin makes people selfish, greedy, lustful, and proud. Sin turns beautiful children into malicious bullies, sexual predators, cold-blooded murderers. Sin ruins families, communities and nations. Human beings have no way to solve the sin problem. But God made a way through the sacrifice of the Lamb.

Why was this sacrifice 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, after death comes judgment, and eternal condemnation (Heb 9:27; 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 this conflict be solved? God's justice and love are reconciled at the cross. This is God's wisdom. We cannot fully understand it with human reason. But one thing is clear. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5:8). No one else could reconcile God's justice and love like this. This is why Christ is worthy to be worshiped.

We can see the power of Jesus' death on the cross in verses 9b-10. With his blood, Jesus purchased for God people from every tribe, language and nation (9b). Though there are so many ethnicities, languages and cultures in the world, one reality is common to all: bondage to sin, death and the work of the devil. This bondage cannot be broken by any human means: money, science, education or good deeds. Only the blood of the sinless Son of God could break the bondage to sin and set people free. Jesus paid this price. This is God's grace, freely given to anyone who believes, regardless of race, social status, or any other human distinctives (Gal 3:28). Through Jesus anyone can experience a new life, heavenly joy, peace and freedom. For this, we should thank God always and worship him.

Christ's redemption restores humankind's identity and purpose in God. Those who believe in Jesus become a kingdom and priests to serve our God (10). No longer are we defined by ethnicity, wealth, achievements, other people's opinions, past failures, family background or our experiences. All

believers are first and foremost servants of the King and members of his kingdom. We are also priests set apart for God's service. Now we can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before him all our days (Lk 1:74-75). This gives us meaning and joy now. And the best is yet to come. We will be royal rulers on the earth with our Lord Jesus Christ (2Ti 2:12).

The second group of worshipers is the heavenly angels. 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 formed a huge chorus with 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) The Lamb fully deserves this worship--a sevenfold tribute to his deity. We find no hint of mere duty in their worship. They worship willingly, joyfully, wholeheartedly.

The third group of worshipers includes every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and on the sea, and all that is in 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!" (13). This is a universal song of praise from all creatures in every realm of creation who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. The redeemed wolf and the lamb form a duet to praise God. The redeemed lion and the calf combine their "roar" and "moo" in a beautiful harmony. Even the poisonous cobra is redeemed and is so friendly that infants can play near its nest in safety. All redeemed creatures worship both God the Father and the Lamb. The four living creatures say, "Amen." The elders fall down and worship (14). What about us? The best way to respond to this worship scene is to join in--to fall down before the Lamb, our Redeemer, and Father God, our Creator and to sing hymns of praise. We join those, down through the generations and around the world, who have been inspired by this passage and sang "Worthy is the Lamb!" (Handel) "All hail the power of Jesus' name," "Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne," and the contemporary "'We fall down,' we lay our crowns at the feet of Jesus" by Chris Tomlin. Would anyone like to write a new song based on this passage? The Lamb is worthy of all our worship because he was slain for

our sins. He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and we will reign with him forever and ever. Let's worship the Lamb.