

## Revelation 5

### Worthy is the Lamb

Our world so desperately longs for peace. We desire a world where there is no war, no poverty, no hunger, no hatred and no sorrow. People have hungered for this since the time of Adam's first sin. And so many attempts have been made to try and achieve a just and peaceful world. We've protested, campaigned, reformed economics and education. We have developed new technologies and even resorted to war. There is however, only one hope for peace; it will come when the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, returns to rule the world.

Today we are going to read Revelation 5, which is all about our Lord Jesus Christ. We are still reading about John's experience of heaven and the throne of God. All of Revelation 4 was about the majesty of God. And the chapter came to a dramatic climax as the four living creatures and the 24 elders praised God saying,

You are worthy, O Lord,  
To receive glory and honor and power;  
For You created all things,  
And by Your will they exist and were created.  
(Revelation 4:11)

In a similar way chapter 5 will climax with all of creation praising Jesus Christ saying that he is worthy of power and riches and wisdom and honor and glory. He is worthy not because he is the Creator, but because he is our Redeemer.

The scene opens with God on His throne with a scroll in his right hand. This scroll contains information about the future of our world. It will tell us about a great war between good and evil. It will tell us about the things God's people will suffer at the hands of the wicked. We will learn about the justice of God and His wrath against sin and evil. And finally we will learn about a world at peace.

But the scroll needs to be opened for its contents to be fulfilled. The trouble is no one in all of history has been worthy to take the scroll and open it—no one but Jesus Christ.

And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed

with seven seals.  
(Revelation 5:1)

In the ancient world of John's day there were no books as we have them today. Writing was done on sheets of papyrus. When a document was finished it was rolled up and tied shut with a string. If it was an important document where the string was tied shut there would be a hot wax seal placed on the string. This kept the information in the document secure until the person with the right authority could open it.

Very important Roman documents were sealed with seven seals. The scroll in God's hand is extremely important. When it is unrolled it will reveal the tribulation that God's people will endure, the judgment of God on evil and the title deed to rule the earth given to Jesus Christ.

Here are two profound truths from verse 1. First, the whole story of human history rests in God's right hand. He knows where history has been and where it is going and that it is His will that shall prevail. Secondly, this history is written not merely proclaimed. A written sealed history is symbolic of what is permanent. What is written cannot be changed. But who is worthy to open the scroll?

And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup>Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" <sup>3</sup>And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. <sup>4</sup>So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.  
(Revelation 5:1-4)

In response to the angel's challenge no one at first came forth to open the scroll. And so John wept much with anguish of heart. John wept because he knows the importance of the scroll. He knows the destiny of all things is revealed in the scroll. So who is really worthy to take and open the scroll?

This is really the big question at the heart of all politics. Who is capable of leading us toward the solution to all of our troubles? Who is smart enough? Strong enough? Moral enough? Who is worthy? There is only one person who is worthy and one of the 24 elders points him out to John.

So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read[a] the scroll, or to look at it. <sup>5</sup>But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold,

the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

(Revelation 5:4, 5)

We are now at the entrance to one of the most dramatic scenes in the whole book. John has been crying tears of sorrow, because no one can reveal the contents of the scroll. But one of the 24 elders tells John to weep no more and then he points to Jesus Christ. And the elder gibes Christ two great titles. First Jesus is called the lion of the tribe of Judah.

This title has its origin in Genesis 49 where Jacob blessed his sons before his death. And he prophesied and called Judah a lion's whelp or cub. If Judah was a lion's cub, then his greatest descendant, Jesus Christ is the great Lion of Judah. The strength and nobility of a lion is a good emblem for the Messiah.

Secondly, Jesus is called the Root of David meaning that Jesus is a descendant of King David. Jesus is the promised King who will rule forever. These titles from the Old Testament point to Israel's Messiah and Savior. It seems odd to me that so many commentators rush past these titles that deal with Israel. But it will become clear as we read Revelation that God will keep His promise to save and exult Israel. All of earth's history is moving toward a grand climax and Israel is at the center of it all, not the US, not Russia or China or Africa, Asia or Europe. The world cannot be blessed and restored until Israel is blessed and restored.

So, the elder points John to Jesus Christ the Root of David and Lion of Judah. And we expect to turn with John and look upon a lion roaring with power and shaking its great mane. But with John we do not see a lion, but a lamb.

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

(Revelation 5:6)

Here is the central moment of the vision: the image of Jesus Christ as the Lamb. Jesus Christ is not really a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. These are all symbolic of a greater truth. And the body of the Lamb is wounded from having been put to death in a brutal fashion. Lions conquer and roar. Lambs submit and are sacrificed. The meaning is clear. Here is one who conquers as a roaring lion, because he submits to the will of God. This little lamb bears the

wounds of a sacrifice. But he also has seven horns and seven eyes. What do these mean?

The number seven in the Bible stands for complete fullness. And in the Old Testament horns always symbolize power, because in the animal realm they are used in combat. For example Psalm 92:10 reads "But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox." The horn also stands for honor. Psalm 112 tells us,

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,  
Who delights greatly in His commandments...  
His righteousness endures forever;  
His horn will be exalted with honor.  
(Psalm 112:1, 9)

Jesus also has seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God. These Spirits are the seven spiritual beings that stand before the throne of God. We first read about them in chapter 1 verse 4. Then in chapter 3 Jesus tells us these Spirits serve him. The eyes and Spirits speak of knowledge, intelligence, and discernment. There is nothing on earth or in heaven that escapes Christ's understanding. For example Zechariah 4:10 speaks of the seven eyes of Yahweh/God who knows all about the condition of Israel and the rebuilding of the temple.

Here in verse 6 we have the paramount portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. He is the fulfillment of God's mercy to Gentiles. He is the Lamb who bore the sins of the world. He was sacrificed and humiliated, but that has now been overturned by victory. Jesus Christ is the one conquering power no one can overcome and whose all-seeing eyes no one can escape!

Who is worthy to take the scroll and reveal the climax of history? The Lion like Lamb, Jesus Christ. And when he takes the scroll from the hand of God, all of heaven and then all of creation breaks forth in songs of great praise.

Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup> Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having 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:

"You are worthy to take the scroll,  
And to open its seals;  
For You were slain,  
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood

Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,  
<sup>10</sup> And have made us kings and priests to our God;  
And we shall reign on the earth.”

<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels  
around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders;  
and the number of them was ten thousand times ten  
thousand, and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with  
a loud voice:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
To receive power and riches and wisdom,  
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

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

“Blessing and honor and glory and power  
Be to Him who sits on the throne,  
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

<sup>14</sup> Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the  
twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who  
lives forever and ever.  
(Revelation 5:7-14)

It is so important for us to grasp this whole scene of worship in our hearts  
before we get into the details. Hers is a magnificent chorus of praise to Jesus  
Christ. Who authorized such praise to be given to the Lord Jesus Christ? God,  
Yahweh, the Almighty did. In John 5:22, 23 we are told about the divine  
judgment that will come upon our world and we read,

For the Father judges no one, but has committed all  
judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup> that all should honor the Son  
just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor  
the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

So all of heaven praises the Son. First there is the song sung by the four  
living creatures and the 24 elders. They sing because of what Jesus Christ has  
done for fallen and sinful humanity. The King James Version and the New King  
James Version of the Bible seem to make the song to be about the living  
creatures and the elders. But theologically it cannot be about them. And the  
better Greek manuscripts reveal this. The songs should read,

You are worthy to take the scroll,  
and to open its seals:  
because You were slaughtered,  
and You redeemed people  
for God by Your blood  
from every tribe and language  
and people and nation.  
You have made them a kingdom  
and priests to our God,  
and they will reign on the earth.<sup>1</sup>

Then the four living creatures and the 24 elders are joined by ten thousand times ten thousand times an innumerable number of angels who proclaim,

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power  
and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and  
glory and blessing.

Finally this chorus of praise to Christ crescendos with all of creation redeemed by Christ singing to both the Father and the Son declaring,

Blessing and honor and glory and power to Him who  
sits on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever.

Earth was created to be a Paradise, but sin has enslaved it to the curse. But one day Jesus Christ will release it from its bondage to corruption.<sup>2</sup> And when the joyous praise of all creation has ended then the cherubim and the elders continue to worship—“Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four[h] elders fell down and worshiped.”<sup>3</sup> All of this praise and worship John saw and shares with us. This is where history is moving.

There are a few more truth that I wish to share with you. It is interesting that the elders back in verse 8 have harps. The harp was the traditional instrument to which the psalms were sung. There were also trumpets and lutes and rums and cymbals. There is joyful music in heaven and there should be joyful music in the church.

The elders also have golden bowls full of incense representing our prayers. It is encouraging and comforting to know that none of our prayers is ever lost. So

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<sup>1</sup> Holman Christian Standard Bible

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:18-21

<sup>3</sup> The last phrase of verse 14 “Him who lives forever and ever” is not in the best Greek manuscripts.

let your heart sing and let your heart pray! Finally, we were redeemed, bought back from slavery to sin by the blood of Jesus Christ.

He sacrificed his life for every man and woman from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. This is purposeful and intentional. Let me say this in modern political terms: ALL lives matter—every race, every language, every ethnicity. Christ's redemption brings us all back to God. And we are made a kingdom. People are separated by race, by politics, by ideals and values. But now we are a kingdom, the people of God and we must know and live for His ideals and values.

And Christ has made us all priests. In the ancient world only the priest could approach God. But through Jesus Christ all of us have access by one Spirit to the Father. We are united to one another and united to Christ and united to God by one Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Life is not a series of random events. There is a war between good and evil. And there are people who will live forever in glory even though they may suffer and die today. And there are people who really seem to live now, but who will perish forever. The difference will result from your relationship to the Lion like Lamb and his God. Will you trust and serve Christ and God now—today? The decision must be made today, tomorrow may be too late.

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<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:19; All of us have been baptized into one Spirit and made to drink one Spirit – 1 Corinthians 12:13.