

The Lamb, Who Alone Is Worthy

Revelation 5 — Part One: Revelation 5:1–8a

Last week we ended Revelation 4 with an implied dilemma. We have the 24 elders falling down in worship before eternal God, who is holy, holy, holy, crying out,

**“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”**

They are declaring that God is worthy of worship by all creation because he is the Creator of all that is. He made it, he made it for his purposes, and he holds it together for his purposes. We reviewed the great passage in Colossians during our corporate reading last week, recalling that For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. His perfect design is that all he has made glorify him. The heavens are to declare the glory of God, as **Psalm 19:1** says. And as the crown of creation, humans have a special place of honor in glorifying God. **Isaiah 43:6b–7** writes God’s Purpose Statement over our hearts and lives:

... bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth,

⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

What is the dilemma we are left with at the end of chapter 4?

Is all a creation giving God the glory he is due and that he has assigned to be brought forth from creation? Romans 8 tells us all creation is groaning waiting for the culmination of the age when it will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. And what about the crown of creation? Do you have any sense that every woman, man, boy, and girl is glorifying God as God designed? No. Sin and rebellion brought ruin and curse in Genesis 3. Perhaps to the casual observer it may appear that the plans and purposes of God have been thwarted. Either that, or Revelation 4:11 is just some fanciful hope that fits some aspirational narrative, but does not, and will not exist in reality. But neither of those are the case, for no purpose of God can be thwarted. (Job 42:2) So the dilemma is that the worship described at the end of chapter 4 is not yet fully realized — and will it ever be? That’s why we need chapter 5. In Revelation 5 we see the redemption in place of ruin, re-creation replacing fallen creation, and blessing instead of curse. It is the completion of what God intended in his creation. Ready to see it? Let’s read!

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Revelation 5 — 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. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ 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.”

⁶ 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. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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,

¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

¹¹ 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, ¹² 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!”

¹³ 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!” ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

PRAY — May we see what the Apostle was privileged to see: The Lamb of God in both sacrifice and triumph. May we weep where he weeps, worship as he worships. Let our hearts be both captivated and conquered by the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And let us be transformed by the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Every knee will ultimately bow, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Let every knee under the sound of your living, convicting word bow today; let every tongue confess you as Lord to the glory of the Father while we live under the kindness and mercy of this day of grace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

5:1 — 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.

The Bible is about God, the Creator. It is about his creation, his purposes, his plan, his glory. He is the gravitational center of everything. His plan is the only plan that stands. The book of Revelation reveals the culmination of the age. That is, the God who has been on the throne remains on the throne, and ever shall be on the throne bringing about the perfect redemption of his creation. As we move into the next part of this epic worship service, we see the unfolding of his plan for the redemption of the universe beginning to come to full maturity and completion. This is fulfillment of what John was told he would see in **Revelation 4:1** — the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” The scroll written within and on the back is God’s full account of how he will ruin rebellion, undo the effects of the curse, and judge and condemn sin for all eternity. Let that sink in for a minute. Stand with the Apostle John and see that remedy, written by God himself for all the evil and brokenness and sin of all times, all peoples, all places. One of the catch phrases we are always hopeful we will hear in our lifetime is that there will be a cure for cancer. What a celebration would take place on streets around the world if such a discovery was made! Well, cancer is but one tiny piece of the curse of Genesis 3. When sin entered, it left nothing untouched, untainted, or untingered. It wrecked the creation, producing death, and ruined the human heart, leaving it deceitful above all things, desperately sick, and morally bankrupt. It is beyond repair. We all feel these things. We know what it is to bury loved ones. We know the pain of brokenness from selfishness and sin, often originating in our own heart. We agonize, if we are God’s children, about the internal war between our new heart and the old sinful nature, and cry out with Paul in Romans 7, “Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” And now, there in the hand of the Eternal One, who sits on the throne of the universe, the cure, the remedy, the redemption of everything.

God’s plan is comprehensive. It is **written within and on the back**. No detail is left to chance. No item unforeseen. Did you ever consider that God does not have a budget line item labeled, “Contingencies”? The totality of redemption and new creation has been determined. Every sin is judged and punished. Every. Single. Sin. This is spelled out in the doctrine of Penal Substitutionary Atonement. There is no offense against God is unnoticed or overlooked. The sins of those who come to Christ were not reduced or dismissed by a liberal judge. The full price of those sins was hung on the Savior as he hung on the cross. Every sin you have committed, believer in Christ, has had the death penalty assigned to it, all the weight of condemnation, and it was laid on Christ on the cross,

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where he atoned for those sins. And what of the sins of those who are not in Christ? The full weight and punishment of their sins will be borne by them, not by Christ. Every sin will be judged as an act of treason against holy God, and the wrath of God that has been storing up against sin will be poured out in devastating judgment. All of these things are comprehensively written down for perfect judgment and salvation. The significance and impact of this scroll in God's hand is apparent to John. You can imagine, in the heart of the beloved disciple — the one whose Gospel and epistles are marked by God's love and our great calling to obey God out of love — finally all of the rebellion and offense against this loving, gracious God is coming to an end and the restoration of Eden is at hand. Oh, what overwhelming joy he must feel that God's plan is about to be unfolded!

But then a call goes out in v. 2 through all of heaven, and all of creation, looking for someone who is **worthy to open the scroll and break its seals**. The plan is sealed and unknown at that moment. Seven seals prevent the scroll from being known and executed. We are familiar now with the significance of the number 7 and its frequent use and meaning in Revelation. It symbolizes perfection and completeness. It points to God's perfections, which are marked by his holiness, his moral goodness. It is the picture of moral perfection, holiness, sinlessness that is represented by the seals. **God's plan to undo sin cannot be accomplished by someone or something that is sinful.** One single sin of thought or attitude or omission or commission is one sin more than holiness can bear; and it is one sin that must be judged and punished. So when the angel calls out for someone worthy to open this seven-sealed plan for the undoing of sin, it must be done by someone without sin; someone in whom holiness and righteousness inheres. If we had not already read the passage... if you were not already memorizing it... knowing, now, the requirements for opening and executing God's redemption plan, how many created beings are going to present themselves when this call goes out for moral worthiness, for holiness of character? How people are going to step up and say, "I can do it. I'll judge and punish sin because I'm morally pure and have the moral authority to do it." Well that lets out the crown of creation, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And as the call rings down the halls of all the universe, looking for one who is inherently holy, perfectly just, and positively righteous, no one is found.

In fact we have a triplet underscoring the moral incapacity of all of creation to be able to produce the holiness and moral purity required to execute God's plan: no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And John weeps. He weeps that plan of God for the redemption of creation apparently will be thwarted because no one has the moral capacity, the

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holiness necessary to carry it out. He weeps because the enemies of God will apparently continue their evil offenses against this good God. What he feels in grief over is rooted in the same place where hatred is expressed by David in **Psalm 139:21–22** — **Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.**

John weeps at the unending offense and assault against holy God's rule and reign. Parents, you may have felt just a touch of what John is feeling when your child — the child you would lay down and die for, and defend with your life because you love them so — when your child comes home in tears because someone insulted them or said something cruel or unkind. You may weep! Well, as much as you love your child, God is worthy of infinitely greater white-hot love and devotion; he is the giver and sustainer of all life, and he is altogether lovely. At his right hand are pleasures forevermore.

John's loud weeping seems two-fold, responding both to the ongoing death produced by sin — which now seems to be winning — and the ongoing hateful treason against holy God. Oh, that we would be gripped by the same deep awareness of sin and what it produces in both directions. Oh, that rivers of tears would stream down our faces not only for our own sins and their contempt for the God who loves us, but for the sins of those we love and are dying in their sins all around us. Let us look long, and behold deeply the holy God of love who sits on the throne. When we know him as John knows him, we will weep as John weeps, and repent of what affronts his holiness and love. The remedy for our rebellion and idolatry, the heart-condition of deep desire for holiness will not be found in adjusting behaviors, but in beholding the Savior. The weeping springs from the seeing and the knowing. As we noted from Psalm 27 last week, if we will set our hearts to gaze on the beauty of the Lord we will learn to love what he loves, hate what he hates, and be moved by what moves him.

But a glorious ray of holy hope shines out of **v. 5** — **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.”**

Weep no more, John! All is not lost! There is one who is morally qualified; one who is holy, holy, holy; one with no stain, no spot, no blemish; he is able to open and execute God's plan for redemption. John, it's the Messiah himself. That's what is communicated in the Messianic language of those two titles.

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- The Lion of the tribe of Judah is rooted in Genesis 49:9–10 where the promise from Jacob to Judah is fulfilled. He subdues all the peoples under his rule and reign.
- The Root of David comes from Isaiah 11 where the perfect, ideal King comes from the line of David and does what no earthly King has been able to do: He judges in righteousness and ushers in the Kingdom of peace.

Don't weep, John. All the prophecies that God gave concerning his redemption of the world — all of it are going to come about right on schedule according to God's plan because the Messiah, alone, is worthy to open the scroll and execute it.

As John wipes and clears his eyes he sees the conquering King the elder just described. And looks there, in close proximity to the throne, to see this conquering King, but he does not appear as we expect a conquering King to be. I can imagine that John may have had to do a double take, because he sees a very young lamb — literally a lambkin. As John describes the scene it stretches our capacity to see and understand it without thinking deeply about it.

- This young spotless lamb is standing. It is not incapacitated.
- It is looking as though it had been slain. He bears the mark of sacrificial slaughter — his throat is slit and sure his wool coat is covered in blood. Yet he is standing in readiness for action.

As Mounce notes his commentary, John brilliantly captures in one stroke the central theme of the New Testament revelation. A slit throat resulting in death; yet he has defeated death and lives as the conquering King. The Apostle sees here in realized victory what John the Baptist saw by faith in **John 1:29** — **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! See and embrace this essential truth: It is on the basis of Christ's atonement for sin, and only on that basis, that the world is redeemed and restored.**

Weep no more! The king has conquered! Death is defeated! The Lamb is worthy to open and execute God's plan for the redemption of all creation. There is no call for weeping, but for worship!

Then he notes that the lamb has seven horns on his head. To try to picture that reminds us of the symbolism employed throughout the book: God reveals these truths through pictures when words are not adequate or some of the meaning remains hidden. We see three sevens here: seven horns, seven eyes, seven spirits. So God's perfection, his completeness, his holiness dominates each item.

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- Horns often represent power or authority. We have a tether back to Deuteronomy 33:17 that gives us insight. **Deuteronomy 33:17** says, **A firstborn bull—he has majesty, and his horns are the horns of a wild ox; with them he shall gore the peoples, all of them, to the ends of the earth...** Horns that gore the people is a metaphor for judging the nations. So the Lamb with seven horns is the all-powerful righteous judge of all nations.
- The seven eyes — the perfect vision of omniscient God — remind us that we are accountable to the Lamb who sees everything. **Hebrews 4:13** — **And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.** We are accountable for every deed done in the flesh; every thought, attitude. This must drive us to cry out to the Lamb of God for forgiveness before this Great Day of accounting comes. Note also an equally glorious truth to ponder this week: He knows everything. That is at once fear-producing, and worship igniting. If he knew everything only to hold it against us, we would be lost. But he knows everything, and pays for everything for those who come to him in faith in repentance.

Oh, to see the pain written on your face, bearing the awesome weight of sin.

Every bitter thought, every evil deed crowning your blood-stained brow.

This the power of the cross: Christ became sin for us.

What a love! What a cost! We stand forgiven at the cross... because not sin is left to our account.

- The seven spirits of God references the Holy Spirit, as we have already seen in chapters 1, 3, and 4. The Holy Spirit sent out into all the earth heralds the perfect knowledge of God in judgment. The Holy Spirit knows our spiritual condition, whether we have been born again into Christ, or we remain dead in sins in Adam. It is the Spirit, after all, who affects the change of our spiritual condition both in salvation and sanctification.

The revelation of this conquering Lamb commands and fuels his worship from all of creation. So much more could be said, but let's wrap up today remembering that Jesus, the Son of God, brings to completion the Father's plan. I mentioned the triplet of "in heaven, on earth, and under the earth" when no one was found worthy. But I suspect you will quickly recognize the same triplet from Philippians 2 in describing the final outcome of God's redemption: This Lamb has been made both Lord and Christ, and God has given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue will confess the Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Weep no more. Jesus is the Victor. Come to him now, trusting his atoning work for your sin. There is no other hope, no other Lamb. Nor is there any need for any other. This Lamb of God is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals. [PRAY]