

**The Lamb Rules, Let's Worship**  
**Revelation 5:1–10**  
**July 8, 2018**

A phone call on Monday brought my family and me into a different sphere of life. The physician that had biopsied two spots a couple of weeks back, now told me that he had bad news. He said that I had mantle cell lymphoma, a rare type of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma that has no cure and that likely is in other places in my body. Due to its aggressiveness that he had already set up an appointment for me with an oncologist and that I could expect chemotherapy soon.

Fortunately, Karen was with me and listened to the doctor's comments and asked questions along with me. We felt the shock together as we cried, breathed a prayer, and sought set our hearts on trying to rest in the Lord. I must say that the Lord met us at that time with comfort amidst the many unanswered questions in our thoughts. That didn't mean our tears stopped or that we had no struggle explaining the diagnosis to our family. We've felt the heaviness of what lies ahead as we've worked through the process of seeing other doctors and aiming for treatment.

So, as I've pondered this week what I'm facing in the days ahead—and not alone but with my family and church family and a lot of good friends—I was put on a good path by Matt as I met Thursday with our elders, that he has continued to think on a part of 1 Corinthians 12:26: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.” Whether it's me with mantle cell lymphoma or you with another infirmity or incredibly hard burden or a troubling family issue or persecution at your job because of the gospel—whatever it is, we suffer together; we suffer hand-in-hand as brothers and sisters in Christ bearing one another's burdens.

This is where Revelation 5 comes in. John wrote to suffering saints. In their case, persecution loomed among some and had already landed with others. They felt it. So what do we do as the body of Christ when suffering in its myriad ways comes? John has just the answer. *When suffering comes let's worship the King*. And we can only do that if we get a good glimpse of the Lord whom we worship. Our text provides us with that kind of picture so that we're encouraged to worship. I want us to walk through and observe what John describes, and let the Word serve to fuel our worship.

## 1. A book in the right hand on the throne

We've already seen a throne in chapter 4 with "One sitting on the throne" that totally eclipses human understanding or explanation. John can just give pictures of something brilliantly glorious and transcendent, served by representatives of the redeemed in all ages (4:2-4). The four living creatures around the throne cry out day and night, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (4:8).

But then as we move to the next scene in this picturesque apocalyptic book, he returns to the throne. **"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."** What's in the book? With it written inside and outside, it means that nothing more can be added. It's a book that contains the *complete details* of the unfolding of God's plan of redemption, judgment, and His providential governing of His creation. The perfect passive verb, **"written,"** means that no detail is left out, and that *the Lord God did the writing* of every detail. It's God's purposes, plans, and rule pictured in this perfectly sealed book, with the seals authenticating it as authored by the Lord God.

Why is the book in the right hand? That's the hand of authority. It implies His absolute rule since it's the right hand of the One sitting on the exalted heavenly throne of the whole creation. He has the authority to execute every detail that He has planned.

Why does He sit on a throne? One simple reason: He rules and no one can contradict or usurp His rule. One may complain about God's governance or shake his fist in anger at the way that God orders some detail in a life. Might an ant raise its fist against a tank? I suppose that it can try but that's a foolish, wasted effort. So if we're not to complain or get angry in those details, then instead, we're to learn to trust in the wisdom, grace, and purpose of this One sitting on the throne.

## 2. No one able or worthy to open the book

John's eyes are fixed on the book, especially when he sees **"a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice [lit., mega-voice], 'Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?'"** In other words, who is worthy to govern the details of redemption, judgment, and all of life? Who has the wisdom, power, righteousness, goodness, and justice to

exercise that kind of decisive reign over the creation? John pauses and waits. No one steps up. Then he realizes, **“And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.”** *If no one is worthy to open the book—and so comprehend with wisdom and power its contents—or to look into it—and so carry out its decrees, then how does that affect our hope in the midst of suffering, trials, persecution, and loss?* If there is no one to govern those details then we live by chance. Everything is random. We spend our lives trying to exist by four-leaf clovers and lucky rabbit’s feet. We consider luck as the supreme human experience.

John reacts because he understands that the book written by the Almighty delivers us from a random life that lives by assuming if he can just stay positive everything will go his way. But isn’t that kind of self-effort rather hard to do? There’s no positive spin on human trafficking or abortion or murder or corruption or pride or countless other daily occurrences. Positive people are not immune to suffering, loss, and trials. Those things are part of the fallen world. It rains on the just and the unjust.

So John wails. **“Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it.”** Despair sunk in. Here’s what he realized. If there’s no Lord to order details for our lives then our sorrows and suffering and trials have no purpose. They’re just random and God is scurrying around in panic as much as we are trying to manage the difficulties. Those things then become an end in itself instead of a God ordained path to know and experience the glory of God.

Thank God for the faithful heavenly elder that stopped John’s despair! **“And one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping.’”** Is that cruel for him to say to a man exiled on the Isle of Patmos, separated from his family and friends, left to suffer loneliness and loss at the end of his life when John is aghast that no one is worthy, and so able, to discharge the plans and details that God purposed for us before the foundation of the world? The angel spoke with authority, ‘Now John, stop that weeping! No more of it!’ **“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.”**

### **3. A Lion that has overcome**

All attention now centers on this Lion that the elder proclaims. There is the hope that John has, that there is One who has the qualifications, and so **“worthy to open the book and its seven seals,”** thereby ordering and governing all of the intricate details of life—the ups and downs, the suffering and flourishing, the joy and the trials.

What is His identity? Quite clearly, John ties him to the right of rule that Jacob assigned to Judah the “lion’s whelp” to whom belongs “the scepter” (Gen 49:9–10) and to the promise of an eternal King that God gave to David (Isa 11:1; 2 Sam 7:13–16). So he uses Messianic language. It’s what the Old Testament predicted and the New Testament declares concerning Jesus Christ. The King whose kingdom never ends, whose reign never wavers, whose wisdom has no boundaries, whose power never fails, whose love cannot be measured—that King is the one the elder describes. He is worthy to open the book and break the seals.

This King alone is worthy to order even the most difficult details for us *because He alone can work it for good*. That’s why Romans 8:28 is not religious-speak. It’s the Lord Jesus acting with love, power, and divine energy to synchronize the details of life—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and cause them to work together for our good. The One who justifies us also glorifies us, so nothing between is wasted or worthless or needless.

But what had to be *overcome* in order for Him to open the book and discharge its contents? *The curse had to be overcome*. That which wrecked the good creation and harmony of the human race in Genesis 3 had to be overcome. That’s the cross-work of the Lord Jesus. That’s the sin-bearing, Satan-crushing, curse-spoiling, death-destroying, atonement-applying work of Jesus at the cross and that empty tomb. And what the *Seal-breaker and Book-opener* has been doing for all these years is carrying out His faithful offices as our Prophet, Priest, and King.

Think of it like this. God appointed a man in the garden to rule on His behalf over the creation, “to fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28). But that man failed, and with his failure he brought down the creation. The ruler God appointed never ordered and governed as God purposed for him. *Yet all the while the Father had prepared His Son to overcome all that had corrupted and wrecked the creation, restoring it through laying down His life in order to take up the wise, righteous rule*. The curse had

to be overcome. And Jesus did it at the cross. Our gaze at the bloody cross and empty tomb should fill us with hope and assurance that whatever God ordains is right and good and will demonstrate His love and faithfulness to those Jesus has redeemed.

#### **4. A Lamb slain and standing**

So John looks for the Lion, and what does he see? **“And I saw in the midst of the throne with the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as one having been slaughtered as a sacrifice (never to be slaughtered again)”** [my translation]. The Overcomer did His overcoming work as the Lamb of God, the One that fulfilled the Passover lamb, the One for whom all the thousands of slain sacrificial lambs pointed to, the One that ended the Day of Atonement by atoning for sin once and for all, the One whose death satisfied God’s demand for eternal justice. But the slaughtered Lamb is *standing*, so One that has conquered sin and death, having been raised from the dead never to die again.

Since the slain Lamb is standing then those united to Him live in the same resurrection hope. That’s why the trials, suffering, persecution, tragedies, and losses in the grand scheme are just blips on the screen, never to appear again for eternity. Jesus’ resurrection declares it so. If we see the slaughtered Lamb standing, then we have to agree, “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18).

#### **5. Seven horns, seven eyes, seven Spirits**

What are these horns and eyes about? The Lamb has (“having,” as though ‘having and ever having’) **“seven horns and seven eyes.”** *Seven* is the number of perfection. Horns represent authority and power, while eyes represent vision, sight, knowledge, and understanding. So the Lamb has *all power*, He’s omnipotent; and *all wisdom*, He’s omniscient. This Lamb has all power so He has everything necessary to carry out the details of governing what He, through His infinite wisdom, has ordered for us. So, let us not fret as though *our circumstances* are too big or too desperate for Him

Then John links the seven horns and seven eyes—His omnipotence and omniscience—to **“the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”** By that, he

means that the Holy Spirit has been sent with all power and wisdom to accomplish the details of this reign. He has been **“sent out into all the earth.”** Not one place we go, not one experience we encounter, not one difficulty we face, not one rogue cell we possess escapes the powerful, wise application of the Spirit in our lives. Be encouraged, the Holy Spirit has been *sent* as the Trinitarian representative to supply everything we need that has been given to us in Christ for the sufferings of this present age.

## **6. The Lamb took the book**

After that kind of introduction, John now gets to the point about the wise, powerful ordering and governing of Jesus Christ over every detail of our lives. **“And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”** The Lamb took the book—so the Lord Jesus is the One unfolding the contents of the book. This is the One that laid down His life for the sheep, who promised to prepare a place for us in the Father’s House, who said the He’d never leave us nor forsake us, and who sits at the Father’s right hand to intercede for us.

On Monday, when I got that “bad news” call from the doctor, the thing that gave me encouragement and hope at such a bleak report is that the One that took the book out of the Father’s right hand ordered it and governs it, all for my good and the good of those around me, and ultimately for His glory. That doesn’t mean no suffering or difficulty or sorrow will follow. Those things are part-and-parcel of living in a fallen world. They’re meant to help us in our longings and ambitions so that we aim for glory not comfort, for eternal joys not momentary pleasure. You see, when the Lamb took the book it was a heavenly declaration, “He reigns, He reigns, Jesus reigns, He reigns forevermore!” That, brothers and sisters, is our comfort and peace.

## **7. So let’s join in worship!**

What happened after this heavenly scene of the revelation of the Lion-Lamb that took the book and reigns? All of heaven broke out in worship! They saw something that we need to see. Their vision is unclouded by the pain and sorrow and anguish about us. They see things as they really are. While knowing, as we see later in Revelation (6:9–11), the suffering of the saints, they broke loose in utterly glorious worship!

**“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. 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.**

**You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”**

Where is the fretting over the dire circumstances that had befallen the saints? Where is the despair over the martyrs? Where is the moroseness over the uncertainties around them? *Gone at the sight of the Lamb that overcame and took the book to rule.*

So keep writing new songs because the realities of Christ's mercies and grace and power and love are inexhaustible. Our worship must never, never be dull or thoughtless or perfunctory when we have such a King that reigns over us with wisdom and power, and who is worthy to be praised for all eternity.

So we don't waste our sufferings by drawing into a shell and having a pity-party. We worship because the Lamb has overcome and rules forever.