

10/31/21 “Worthy is the Lamb”
Revelation 5:1-14

Our Bible text this morning includes a song praising Jesus, whose blood purchased for God men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Let me share an example with you.

Three weeks ago I was in Charlotte NC for the annual Association of Certified Biblical Counselors conference. Victor Zubarev was there as well, all the way from Moscow, Russia. In 2013, I traveled to Russia to teach Biblical Counseling classes at the Russian Bible Church in Moscow and at a seminary in Samara.

Moscow has a population of 12 million people. The city of Moscow is divided into 12 districts, and Victor’s church would like to plant a church in each district.

The first church in Moscow was started in 2009 with 25 church members today there are 342 members and over 500 people attending. Over the past year 60 people joined the church and 30 of them were baptized.

In 2018 the Novomoskovskaya Bible Church
A third church will be started in 2023 East of Moscow
A fourth church will be started in 2024 in Troitsk

Prayer for Victor’s family.
Pray the governing authorities will not interfere with ministry and education opportunities.

Now let’s read Revelation 5...

The events of chapter 5 follow immediately after those of chapter 4. The scene is once again the throne of God in heaven. The cherubim, the twenty-four elders, and the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold glory are all present.

John is given a vision into heaven and weeps because he realizes that God’s glorious eternal plan cannot be completed until the scroll is opened. The centerpiece of this new scene is a remarkable scroll and a single individual who is qualified to take it from the hand of the one on the throne. The choirs of heaven sing, “Worthy is the Lamb!” because Jesus alone meets all of the qualifications to take the scroll from the Father’s hand.

The text unfolds in four steps:

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|------|----------------------|-------------|
| I. | A Mysterious Scroll | Verse 1 |
| II. | A Meticulous Search | Verses 2-4 |
| III. | A Magnificent Savior | Verses 5-7 |
| IV. | A Marvelous Song | Verses 8-14 |

My prayer is that you will enter into the worship experience described in this wonderful passage. That the song Worthy is the Lamb will be on your mind, heart and lips not just here but each day of the week.

I. A Mysterious Scroll

Verse 1...

Now, this is not a book like you and I think of a book. The Greek word here refers to a scroll. A scroll was a long piece of papyrus or animal skin, rolled from both ends into the middle. Scrolls were commonly used before the

invention of the modern book. While Roman wills were sealed up with seven seals, this scroll is not a will but a deed or contract.

Dr. Robert L. Thomas explains: “This kind of contract was known all over the Middle East in ancient times and was used by the Romans from the time of Nero on. The full contract would be written on the inner pages and sealed with seven seals. Then the content of the contract would be described briefly on the outside. All kinds of transactions were consummated this way, including marriage-contracts, rental and lease agreements, release of slaves, contract-bills, and bonds. Support also comes from Hebrew practices. The Hebrew document most closely resembling this scroll was a title-deed that was folded and signed, requiring at least three witnesses. A portion of text would be written, folded over and sealed, with a different witness signing at each fold. A larger number of witnesses meant that more importance was assigned to the document.”

Since God is holding the scroll, it must represent a decree from the King of the universe. What we will discover is that the scroll John saw in God’s hand is the title deed to the earth, which He will give to Christ.

Unlike other such deeds, however, it does not record the details of what Christ will inherit, but rather how He will regain His rightful inheritance. He will do so by means of the divine judgments about to be poured out on the earth (we will see that beginning in chapter 6). While the scroll is a scroll of doom and judgment, it is also a scroll of redemption. It tells how Christ will redeem the world from the usurper, Satan.

But it's a sealed scroll. And as the number of seals indicates, it is perfectly and divinely sealed. Only one who is “worthy” will be able to take the scroll and open the scroll and carry out the decree and plan of God it represents.

II. A Meticulous Search

Verses 2-4...

The “strong angel” is not named. Some identify him as Gabriel, others as Michael, but he is anonymous. He spoke with “a loud voice” so that his proclamation would penetrate every corner of the universe. The angel sought someone both “worthy to open the book and to break its seals.”

As the echoes of his announcement end, there is silence. Notice verse 3 says, no one “in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.” A search of the entire universe turns up no one worthy to open the scroll.

Overwhelmed with grief at this turn of events, John tells us in verse 4...

“Weep” is a word that expresses strong, unrestrained emotion. Interestingly, this is the only time in Scripture that tears are seen in heaven.

John wept because he wanted to see the world without evil, sin, and death. He wanted to see God’s kingdom established on earth. Yet John did not need to weep, because the search for the one worthy to open the scroll was about to end.

Friends, what a great reminder that our heavenly Father is completely sovereign, infinitely wise, and His unfailing love for us is an objective fact affirmed over and over in the Scriptures. These things are true about God whether we believe them or not. Our doubts do not destroy God’s love, nor does our faith create it. It originates in the very nature of God, who is love, and it flows to us through our union with His beloved Son.

Psalm 33:10–11 tells us, “The Lord foils the plans of the nations; He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.”

Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”

III. A Magnificent Savior

Verses 5-7...

Notice in verses 5 and 6 there are three unique titles are given to our Lord to describe who He is. First, He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The reference here is to Genesis 49:8–10, where Jacob prophetically gave the scepter to Judah and made it the tribe of the kings. (God never meant for Saul to establish a dynasty, because he came from the tribe of Benjamin. God used him to discipline Israel because the people asked for a king; then He gave them David from the tribe of Judah.)

The image of “the lion” speaks of dignity, sovereignty, courage, and victory. Jesus Christ is the only living Jew who can prove His kingship from the genealogical records. “Son of David” was a title often used when He was ministering on earth.

But He is also the Root of David, which means He brought David (and David’s line) into existence. As far as His humanity is concerned, Jesus had His roots in David (Isaiah 11:1, 10); but as far as His deity is concerned, Jesus is the Root of David. This speaks of our Lord’s eternity; He is indeed the “Ancient of Days.” How the Messiah could both be David’s Lord and David’s son was a problem Jesus presented to the Pharisees, and they could not (or would not) answer Him in Matthew 22:41–46.

Jesus is the One worthy to take the scroll because of who He is—the rightful King from David’s descendants - and what He is - the Lion from Judah’s tribe with the power to destroy His enemies.

As John looked at the incredible scene before him, he found his attention drawn to what he saw between the throne with the four living creatures and the elders. Instead of the anticipated mighty Lion of the Tribe of Judah, John saw a Lamb. Look at Verse 6...

This is the third title, he Lord Jesus could not be the Lion of judgment, or the King of glory, unless He was first “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The Greek word used here for “lamb” refers to a little lamb or pet lamb. The imagery derives from Exodus 12:3-6 and the Passover, when Jewish families were required to keep the sacrificial lamb as a household pet for four days before sacrificing it. While every lamb sacrificed under the Old Covenant pointed toward Christ, He is only referred to as a lamb once in the Old Testament in Isaiah 53:7. In the New Testament outside of Revelation, He is only called a lamb four times (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19). But in the book of Revelation He appears as the Lamb thirty-one times.

Several features indicate that this is no ordinary lamb. First, He is standing, alive, on His feet, yet looking as if He had been slain. The scars from the deadly wound this Lamb received were clearly visible, yet He is alive. Though demons and wicked men conspired against Him and killed Him, He rose from the dead, defeating and triumphing over His enemies.

Another feature about this Lamb that John noted was that it has seven horns. In imagery drawn from the animal world, horns in Scripture symbolize strength and power. Seven is the number of perfection and symbolizes the

Lamb's complete, absolute power. The Lamb in John's vision also had seven eyes, again denoting perfect and complete understanding and knowledge. The eyes represented the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. The phrase "seven Spirits of God" describes the Holy Spirit in all His fullness.

Verse 7 records the final act in this heavenly scene. Verse 7...

When the Lamb came and took the scroll, the weeping ended and the praising began. We have seen a mysterious scroll, a meticulous search, a magnificent Savior, and fourth:

IV. A Marvelous Song

Verses 8-10...

The spontaneous outburst of worship results from the realization that the long-anticipated defeat of sin, death, and Satan is about to be accomplished. Christ will return to earth in triumph and establish His glorious millennial kingdom. The curse will be reversed, the believing remnant of Israel will be saved, and the church will be granted the privilege of reigning with Christ.

As they began their song of praise and worship, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Look back at 4:10...

Since they offer the same worship to Christ that they did to the Father this provides convincing proof of Christ's deity, since only God is to be worshiped (19:10; Matthew 4:10).

As they bow down before the Lamb in worship, John notices that each one of the twenty-four elders is "holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Harps were frequently associated in the Old Testament with worship (2 Samuel 6:4-5; Psalms 33:2; 71:22).

In addition to the harps, the elders were also holding "golden bowls full of incense." These wide-mouthed bowls were used in the tabernacle and the temple (1 Kings 7:40, 45, 50; 2 Kings 12:13-14), where they were connected with the altar. They symbolized the priestly work of intercession for the people.

Scripture associates the burning of incense with the prayers of the saints in Psalm 141:2, Luke 1:9-10, and Revelation 8:3-4. The incense in these bowls represents the prayers of believers through the ages. Taken together, the harps and the bowls indicate that all that the prophets ever prophesied and all that God's children ever prayed for is finally to be fulfilled.

Notice with me that these verses fully answer the question, "Why is the Lamb worthy? Why is He alone worthy to open the scroll?" Verse 5 told us He could open the scroll because "He has overcome, He conquered". But just so there are no misunderstandings about what that means, verse 9 expands on that word "overcome."

Verses 9-10...

The Lamb, Jesus Christ, is worthy...He alone is worthy, because He did what no Davidic king could do before: He was perfectly obedient to God, every second of every day for His entire earthly life. And He continues that way. And because of His perfect obedience, He alone was able to give His life as a ransom, to reclaim, to redeem from the slave market of sinful humanity those "from every tribe [descent] and tongue [language] and people [race] and nation [culture]." Those four terms appear together also in Revelation 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; and 14:6 and encompass all of humanity.

1 Peter 1:18-19 says, “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”

So let me ask you: Do you belong to Jesus? Is He truly your Master? Or are you counting on your own merit and your own performance to get you to heaven?

To the extent you are clinging to any vestiges of self-righteousness or are putting any confidence in your own spiritual attainments, to that degree you are not living by the grace of God in your life. This principle applies both in salvation and in living the Christian life.

Yesterday I officiated the memorial service for our dear sister in Christ, Dianne Case. Dianne became a Christian at the age of 15 and really lived out the words of John 12:24...

Dianne lived out the essence of gospel-humility – which mean not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less... True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. Dianne made every person feel special, and in the remembrances yesterday it was repeatedly shared that each person felt like they were Dianne’s favorite.

And I think Dianne’s transformation and incredible freedom to love and serve others came from a heart of worship. It was a joyous worship but also a weeping worship. She sensed and experienced how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for her and it moved her all the time.

Jesus alone has conquered sin and death. And as a perfect man, without sin, God has appointed Him to perfectly judge the sin of all mankind. To break the book’s seals means to enact the judgments written in it.

The song moves on to express the results of redemption. Notice verse 10...

The use of “them” instead of “us” indicates the vastness and comprehensiveness of redemption. The twenty-four elders move beyond themselves to sweep up all the saints of all the ages into praise and adoration. The redeemed are a part of God’s kingdom, a community of believers under God’s sovereign rule. They are also priests to our God, signifying their complete access to God’s presence for worship and service.

The present priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9) foreshadows that future day when we will have total access to and perfect communion with God. During the millennial kingdom, Revelation 20:6 and 2 Timothy 2:12 remind us we will reign upon the earth with Christ.

Verse 11...

Myriad means “ten thousand,” apparently the highest number the Greeks had in their language. The phrase “myriads and myriads” describes an uncountable host. Hebrews 12:1 also says that the number of holy angels cannot be counted. They number at least twice as many as the fallen angels according to Revelation 12:3–4.

Verse 12...

Once again, the emphasis is on Christ’s death providing a perfect redemption. He is worthy to receive recognition because of His power and the spiritual and material riches He possesses (Psalm 50:10–12). He is also worthy to receive recognition because of His wisdom and omniscience. For all those things and all His other absolute perfections, Jesus Christ is worthy of all honor and glory and blessing.

As the great hymn of praise reaches a crescendo, “every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them” join together. This all-inclusive statement is reminiscent of Psalm 69:34: “Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them,” and the concluding verse of the Psalms, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!” Psalm 150:6.

This mighty chorus cries out in verse 13, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”

Endless worship belongs to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The creation is unable to contain its joy over its upcoming redemption. Verse 14 the four living creatures could only keep saying, “Amen.” That solemn affirmation means “let it be,” “make it happen.”

And in Revelation chapters 4 and 5, the stage for God’s ultimate plan has been set in the throne room of God. And having made sense of the basic elements of the scene in Revelation 5, I want us to think about how this vision should impact our spiritual vision; how you see God, yourself, and the world around you. Let me suggest two words that, for me, might represent a right response to this scene in chapter 5. The words are “worship” and “weeping”.

First, the Lamb’s reception of the scroll all creation, heaven and earth, rise up in worship. Was that your response? When you think of Jesus, when you think of Him as the “Lamb of God”, of His loving sacrifice and cleansing, liberating blood...when you think of Him as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah”, when you think of His authority, when you think of coming judgment and wrath...does it make you worship? Does it drive toward praise and adoration?

We talked last week about how we desperately need to see God for who He is, in His glory and greatness. We need the 'opening scene' from Revelation chapter 4 to be the 'opening scene' of our every day and our everyday experiences; of our every conversation, of our every deliberation when tempted.

But in that same way, we desperately need to see Jesus for who He is. We need to worship Jesus! And what we see here is that the fullness of our worship of Jesus is directly linked to how well we understand the fullness of His worthiness.

What does this look like? Think of the words and phrases we saw in the final section: “the elders fell down” (verses 8, 14), “they sang” (verse 9), they proclaimed “with a loud voice” (verse 12). Kneeling, singing, and shouting are all classic expressions of worship. We find them throughout the Bible. But even more important than these expressions is the kind of heart that would lead you to kneel, sing, and shout at the top of your lungs...and all for God. Take time to personally consider that kind of heart. That's the heart of true worship.

But the second word “weep” is less obvious here. Verse 4 tells us John began to “weep greatly” when it appeared there was no one who could bring ultimate justice to the world. Now John must have known that Jesus was coming again. As the beloved disciple he heard Jesus talk about His return and about the coming judgement and about the hope of the coming kingdom. But clearly John believes here that all of that is in jeopardy; that maybe he has misunderstood something.

John’s heart breaks for the fate of a world that evidently will not receive divine correction or comfort. If our response to the reality of Jesus is one of worship, shouldn't our response to a life, to a marriage, to a family, to a community without Jesus, be one of weeping? Does your heart break, like John’s, when Christ is noticeably absent from the heart of a relative, friend, classmate, coworker, or neighbor?

Friends, these two things must go hand-in-hand in terms of a right response. Our hearts cannot burst with praise for Jesus, but then fail to have His heart for a lost and dying world. Ask God...ask God for a heart full of Jesus and for a heart for those who are desperately lost without Him.

Let's pray...