

“Worthy is the Lamb who was Slain”

(Revelation 5)

Introduction

➤ As we celebrate Resurrection Sunday, I want us to look at a portion of God's Word that is not traditionally considered to be a resurrection passage of Scripture. It does not provide for us the narrative details of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, as we see in the Gospels. Nor does it provide for us the doctrines that are associated with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, as we see in the New Testament epistles. The events that will unfold for us this morning, as we study this passage together, do not depict the events surrounding Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension in the first century.

Rather, this sacred portion of apocalyptic Scripture, found in Revelation chapter five, allows us to see the risen and glorified Christ in heaven, and gives us a unique view concerning what His death, burial, and resurrection accomplished – both immediately and eternally. It occurs at some point in the future, at the beginning of the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. What we have in this passage is the eye-witness account of the apostle John (the repeated use of the phrases “I saw” and “I heard”), as he was supernaturally transported “in the Spirit” (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10) and enabled to see heavenly things.

Rev 5:1-14 ~ “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. ²And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’ ³And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

⁵And 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.’ ⁶And 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. ⁷And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

⁸And 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. ⁹And 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, ¹⁰and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.’

¹¹Then 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, ¹²saying 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!’

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

➤ One thing that must be noted at the outset, in preaching from the book of Revelation, is that it is called the book of Revelation – singular – not Revelations. While this may seem like a small even trivial detail, I assure you that it is not. For many have misunderstood the main teaching of the book of Revelation by incorrectly thinking that it is book about many different (apocalyptic/end times) revelations. But it is not. As we see from the beginning, the entirety of the book of Revelation is about one revelation:

Rev 1:1 ~ “The revelation of Jesus Christ ...”

➤ This book, like essentially every book of the Bible (see Jn.1:45; 5:39; Lk.24:27, 44), is about Jesus Christ – the risen and glorified Christ!

Specifically, in chapter five, we find the narrative of John’s vision of the risen and glorified Christ who alone is worthy to initiate and execute God’s full redemptive plan for mankind. This chapter can be divided into six sections.

I. The curious scene (vs.1)

➤ Notice that God is “*seated on [His] throne*” (vs.1), in sovereign power and authority. God is enthroned in heaven – God’s throne is not empty; God is not frantically pacing back-n-forth in heaven; God has not abdicated His authority; and, contrary to what Nietzsche declared, God is not dead. God is seen actively presiding and ruling over all creation.

John saw God reigning and ruling in heaven, in absolute authority and complete control, as he saw God being worshiped in heaven (ch.4; God’s throne mentioned 12 times in 11 verses).

Rev 4 ~ “After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And 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.’ ²At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. ⁴Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’ ⁹And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹‘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.’”

➤ But this is a curious scene because of what John sees in God’s right hand: “*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*” (vs.1). This “*scroll*” (*biblion*) is mentioned eight times in this chapter (vs.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9), and in verse one we see that there is writing on the front and back of the “*scroll*.”

In ancient times, a sealed scroll (which was typically a long piece of papyrus or animal skin) would indicate that it was an official (royal) document, oftentimes even a last will and testament. The scroll was sealed with wax, and the wax was imprinted with the author’s official or personal mark or seal (usually with his signet ring or official seal), to ensure the content’s authenticity, security, and privacy.

Some scholars believe this scroll is “the Lamb’s book of life.” Others believe it to be God’s title deed to the earth. Still others suggest that it represents God’s covenant with mankind. While it is unwise to be dogmatic on this issue, it is safe to conclude (from the context of the book of Revelation) that this scroll symbolically contains God’s sovereign will for mankind and all of creation. Specifically, we discover (in the following chapters) that as the scroll is opened God’s various judgments are

unleashed upon the earth in the final hour of human history. So, it is safe to conclude that this scroll represents God's prescriptive details concerning the execution of His will for the end of this age. This is a scroll of God's final judgment and redemption for mankind.

- Moreover, we read that the scroll was *"sealed with seven seals"* (vs.1). The fact that this scroll has seven seals indicates just how important and secure it is. Biblically, the number "seven" signifies that which is complete/perfect. This tells us that the scroll is unalterably complete and absolutely perfect. What God has written, no one can erase. What God has done, cannot be undone. What God has planned, cannot be thwarted. What God has ordained, no one can repeal.

There is no 'Plan B' with God. In fact, there really is no 'Plan A.' There is just the God's divine and sovereign plan. God has already prewritten the future; He has already determined the consummation of the age. Every person and everything – every king and every kingdom, every decision and every event, every molecule and every mountain, every nation and every national leader, every grain of sand and every microscopic virus, every natural disaster and every war, every evildoer and every evil demon – will one day be brought, by the Almighty hand of God, into absolute conformity to the sovereign will of God.

- We must also note that this scroll is being held *"in the right hand of [God]"* (vs.1), which is symbolic of God's authority and power (see Acts 2:33-34; Rom.8:34; Col.3:1; cf. Jn.10:27-30). This is God's scroll; He is the author of its contents, and He alone can determine who is able – worthy enough – to open its seals.

2. The prevailing question (vs.2)

- When then read that John saw: *"a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?'"* (vs.2). There is no reason to speculate as to who this angel is because Scripture does not tell us, and this angel is not the central part of this scene. At this point, the spotlight is on the scroll which God is holding in His right hand.
- The angel asked an all-important, most-pressing, question: *"Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"* (vs.2). The thrust of this question is a person's worthiness. This is a call, proclaimed *"with a loud voice"* (vs.2), to find someone who is worthy to open the scroll, administering and executing God's sovereign and eternal decree. The angel shouts, "Who is able to be the executor of God's final judgments on and final redemption for mankind?"

This has to be someone who has the authority and holiness to approach the throne of God and take the scroll out of His hand.

3. The ominous problem (vs.3)

- The angel has shouted the call for someone worthy enough to fulfill all of God's purposes which He established in His will before time began (Eph.1:11). This angelic question rang throughout all creation, and yet *"no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it"* (vs.3). No angel or archangel, no earthly king or ruler, no political party, and no godly saint. It is as if the question from the angel's booming voice can be heard echoing throughout all creation until it stops resonating, in an ominous silence, with no one to answer.
 - ✓ Illust: "This empty search reveals the human dilemma of this present hour that our problems are beyond ourselves and we are incapable and incompetent to solve the dilemma that is around us" (Steve Lawson; sermon: "Our Sovereign Savior").
- For the moment, not a single one was found worthy. No one on earth, no one in heaven, no one in hell. No one in the history of the world, no one in all of creation, is worthy to take the scroll from the right hand of God and implement God's final and eternal purpose for mankind. It appears as though there is no one who can finish what God had started; no one who is worthy to bring a final completion to God's eternal plan.

4. The immediate reaction (vs.4)

- John understood just what this deafening silence meant. In verse four we read, *“and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it”* (vs.4). The angel proclaimed with a *“loud”* (*megas*; vs.3) voice (vs.3), and we read that John wept *“loudly”* (*polus*, “much/many”; vs.4). The difference in these two words (“loud” and “loudly”), not readily evident in our English translation, is that the angel spoke with great volume and John cried with great many tears. John is not merely crying, but sobbing (perhaps uncontrollably). Upon hearing the news that no one is worthy to John is overwhelmed with grief and despair.
- ✓ Illust: It can be easy to become fearful or discouraged if we try to look at God’s sovereignty only through the lens of our human perspective. Perhaps you have felt this way, and can relate to John’s reaction, as you watch the local/national/global news or see the horrors that seem to go unchecked throughout the world – the unrighteous are prospering, injustice is prevailing, error is triumphing over truth. From a human perspective, it can seem as though the world is out of control and that God’s sovereign plan is unraveling before our very eyes.
- At the moment, from a human perspective, John’s immediate reaction was understandable (and seemingly appropriate). For with no one worthy to open the scroll, God’s ultimate plan could not be fulfilled. This means that, if no one is found worthy to open the scroll, sin and wickedness would prevail, and that God had failed; it means that evil would continue to rule in this world, and that evildoers would be free to revel in their evil ways; it means that there is ultimately no justice, no eternal hell (condemnation for sinners) and no eternal heaven (salvation for believers); it means that, when it is all said and done, the crucifixion of Christ had no effect and the resurrection of Christ was ultimately in vain; it means that, in the end, Satan wins and God has lost.

1 Cor 15:13-19, 32 ~ “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ... ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ... ¹⁹If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ... ³² ... If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”

- There could hardly be any more devastating news! God’s Word would not be true, and His promises would only be a myth. If it were true that God’s final decree could not be executed, then God’s sovereign will would only be divine wishful thinking. All would be for naught. But, quite literally, nothing could be further from the truth! And we desperately need to hear this truth.

5. The ultimate solution (vs.5-7)

- Thankfully, *“And one of the elders”* (vs.5) interrupted John’s emotional meltdown and said to him: *“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”* (vs.5). The elder said to John, “Stop crying, and look!” And as John wipes the tears from his eyes so that he can see, and tries to regain his composure, he looks and sees the risen and glorified Christ! This elder exhorts John to shift his focus from a mere human (temporal) perspective, and onto the sovereign (eternal) purpose of God.

The elder identifies Christ in two prophetic ways, both are “Messianic” titles referring to Jesus Christ. First, He is *“the Lion of the tribe of Judah”* (vs.5). The nation Judah is symbolically referred to as a lion (cf. Rev.4:7), and in the Old Testament God declared that out of Judah would come a strong, fierce, and destructive leader (cf. Gen.49:8-10; Heb.7:14). As we have already discussed, the Jews believed that this leader’s invincible power would be used to free them from under the oppression of Rome. From their vantage point, this “messiah” would be a political force to liberate them from physical bondage and tyranny.

The truth is, Jesus Christ (although appearing in human flesh) did not come to reign in political power, but came to earth to reign forever as King of kings and Lord of lords and to free all God's children from the bondage of sin and the oppression of the evil one. The "*Lion of the tribe of Judah*" would indeed conquer, but His conquest would not be fully realized until the Day of Divine Judgment.

Second, Christ is identified as "*the Root of David*" (vs.5). Not only would the Messiah come from the tribe of Judah, but also from the root (or descendent) of David (cf. Is.11:1). It was through Christ that David's kingdom would be forever established and victorious (cf. 2Sam.7:13; Is.9:6-7; Matt.20:30ff; Lk.1:32,69; Acts 13:22-23). Matthew's and Luke's genealogies disclose that Jesus is a descendent of David on both His mother's and father's side (Matt 1:17,20; Lk.3:31). That Jesus Christ is the Son of God and born of the line of David gives Him full right and authority to both the earthly (temporal) and heavenly (eternal) kingdom of God.

➤ This elder told John to stop weeping, because the promised Messiah "*has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals*" (vs.5; "conquered"; *nikao*, triumphed, prevailed). The Messiah has already won! We know that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is the promised Messiah. He alone is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals. For He is God's one and only Son, and He has conquered through His sinless life, substitutionary death, supernatural resurrection, and supreme exaltation to the right hand of God.

1 John 5:5 ~ "Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (see Jn.16:33)

➤ Then John saw something truly awesome, and perhaps very shocking: "*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*" (vs.6). John was undoubtedly expecting to see a triumphant Lion and victorious King. Instead, he saw a slain Lamb. The "Lion of Judah" and the "Root of David" is "the Lamb of God."

While Jesus is described as a Lion, He appears before John as a Lamb. It is important to note that the word used in verse 6 for "*Lamb*" is *arnion* which describes a little (pet) lamb, not *amnos* which is used to describe a "sacrificial lamb." While the word "lamb" (*arnion*) is used in Revelation 29 times, it is only used once elsewhere in NT (Jn.21:15); all other NT uses are *amnos* (a sacrificial lamb). In this distinction we see Jesus as a lamb that was sacrificed and not a lamb to be sacrificed.

For He was "*standing, as though it had been slain*" (vs.6). Although Jesus was showing the signs of death, He was very much alive! He had been slain but is now standing, as He has triumphed from the grave. Through His suffering He has conquered sin. John saw the Lamb of God standing in the throne room of heaven, encircled by the throne of God and the four living creatures and the elders, as all eyes were fixed on the risen and glorified Christ. He is at the center and supremacy of all worship.

1 Cor 5:7 ~ "... For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."

1 Peter 1:18-21 ~ "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (see Is.53:7).

John 1:29 ~ "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"

John 1:35-36 ~ "The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!'"

➤ Jesus was slain – as a sacrificial lamb – for the sins of all who would ever believe. He alone did what we could have never done: He, though absolutely sinless, completely and eternally paid the penalty for our sin. He was crucified in our place for our sin (Is.53:4-6; Rom.5:8; 6:23; 2Cor.5:21). His substitutionary death on the cross, is the only way that sinners can be reconciled to (forgiven by) God. And this gift of salvation is offered to anyone who truly puts their faith in Jesus Christ, receiving Him as the one and only Savior and Lord. For He is worthy!

➤ John also saw that the “*Lamb*” had “*seven horns*” and “*seven eyes*” (vs.6). Biblically, the number seven symbolically represents completion and perfection. Jesus’ “*seven horns*” and “*seven eyes*” signifies that He is perfect, complete, all-sufficient, and absolute.

His “*seven horns*” are denoting his complete omnipotence, that He is all-powerful). This means that nothing, and no one, can defeat Him. He is unstoppable. His will is inevitable. He is invincible. He has no real rivals, no difficult adversaries. He will always prevail, over everything and everyone.

He also has “*seven eyes*” which illustrate His perfect omniscience (He is all-knowing). Nothing surprises Him, and no one deceives Him. He is all-seeing and therefore all-knowing. He knows everything about everything.

He is the all-sovereign all-seeing risen and glorified Son of God, representing “*the seven spirits of God*” (i.e., the fullness of the Holy Spirit; Rev.1:4; 4:5) “*sent out into all the earth*” (vs.6).

➤ With all eyes fixed on the Lamb of God – the risen and glorified Jesus Christ – He does something that, from a mere human perspective, is shocking: “*And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne*” (vs.7). Jesus walked right up to the throne of God, upon which God Himself is seated, and takes the scroll right out of His right hand!

He alone “*is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals*” (vs.2). For He alone is Son of God. He is omnipotent and omniscient. He has once-and-for-all conquered sin and death. He is the Sovereign Savior, the ultimate solution to all of life’s problems.

He alone is worthy to implement God’s sovereign will for mankind. He alone is worthy to execute God’s judgment for all sin and all sinners (Jn.5:22), and He alone is worthy to finalize God’s redemptive plan for believers (those who, in their lifetime, received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior).

6. The appropriate response (vs.8-14)

➤ Jesus taking the scroll from the hand of God sends shockwaves throughout heaven:

Rev 5:8-10 ~ “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. ⁹And 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, ¹⁰and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.’”

➤ The word “*ransomed*” (vs.9; *agorazo*) refers to being purchased, as one would purchase a slave. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ ransomed all true believers, who were helplessly enslaved to sin, and “*made them a kingdom and priests to ... God*” enabling them to “*reign on the earth*” (vs.10).

Acts 20:28 ~ “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

1 Cor 6:19-20 ~ “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

- These heavenly creatures, who exist to worship God alone, fall down and worship the Lamb of God, the risen and glorified Jesus Christ. This is perhaps the strongest evidence in all of Scripture that Jesus is the one and only Son of God. For He worshipped in heaven, by these heavenly creatures, with God seated there on His throne. They are struck down for blasphemy; they are not even rebuked for misguided worship. Because the One who they are worshiping – Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God – is the one and only Son of God! He is worthy of all praise and honor and worship.
- And it does not stop there, for the angels of God join in the worship of the Lamb:

Rev 5:11-12 ~ “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, ¹²saying 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!’”

- And it does not even stop there:

Rev 5:13-14 ~ “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!’ ¹⁴And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped.”

- All of heaven (every elder, every angel, every creature) is worshipping the Lamb of God; everyone on earth (every animal, sea creature, every person) is worshipping the Lamb of God; and everyone in hell (every unbeliever, every demon, even Satan) is worshipping the Lamb of God. All of creation is worshipping the Son of God (see Rev.5:3).

Phil 2:9-11 ~ “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

- It may appear to us, from our human perspective, that the whole world is going to hell. But we can be assured that one day all the world, and all of hell, and all of heaven, will join in worshipping the one and only Son of God – for worthy is the Lamb who was slain.
- And it does not stop there, for this worship of Christ will continue *“forever and ever!”* (vs.13).

Conclusion

- Beginning in Revelation chapter six, we read that the risen and glorified Christ unseals/unleashed the divine judgment of God upon the earth. For it is the Son of God who will redeem those who believe, and it is the Son of God who will condemn those refused to believe.

John 3:35-36 ~ “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

John 5:22-29 ~ “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (see Jn.17:2; Matt.28:18; Rev.19:11-16)

➤ As Christians, we have nothing to fear for we know that Christ is victorious and we, as believers, are victorious in Him (1Cor.15:57; Rom.8:31). We need not be anxious about turmoil in this world, or the uncontrollable circumstances of our lives.

We can know that God is in sovereign control of all His creation, and that He will one day bring everything into absolute conformity to His sovereign will. God's justice will be executed against all unrighteousness, untruth, ungodliness, injustice, and evil; no sin will be left unaccounted for or unpunished.

God will make all things right. In fact, He has already been victorious through His Son – the risen and glorified Jesus Christ!