

Lord and Savior — and Treasure: The Complex Beauty of Christ

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Revelation 5:1–14

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.

One of the reasons that we love Jesus is his paradoxes.

In Jesus in particular, we see realities come together that our human instincts do not expect to be together, and then we see, with surprise and delight, that they do indeed fit together, contrary to our assumptions — and it makes our souls soar with joy.

The beautiful paradoxes of Christ expose our false and weak and small expectations. They remind us that we did not design this world. We do not run this world. And we did not design God's rescue of us. And we cannot save ourselves, but God can, and does, in the Word made flesh.

As Christians, we confess that Jesus is Lord. That is, he is fully God. He is the towering, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful God. As God, he formed and made all things, and every knee will bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus is *Yahweh* — the sacred covenant name of God revealed in Exodus. Jesus is creator, sustainer, supreme Lord of heaven and earth, almighty in power, infinite in majesty, our Lord and our God.

And we confession that Jesus is our Savior. Without ceasing to be God, Jesus took our full humanity, flesh and blood, human body and reasoning soul, with human mind and emotions and will, and with all our lowliness and ordinariness. Jesus had a normal name: *Yeshua*. Joshua. In the incarnation, he added to his eternal divine person a full and complete human nature, and came among us, as one of us, to save us.

So, Jesus is glorious as sovereign Lord, and Jesus is glorious as our rescuing, self-sacrificing Savior. And we come to Revelation 5 to linger in the paradox and beauty of majesty and meekness, of might and mercy, of grandeur and gentleness, in this one spectacular person.

##Our Longings Met in Jesus

In verse 1, the apostle John looks and sees — in the hand of God, the one seated on heaven’s throne — “a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.” These are the eternal and hidden purposes of God to be unfolded in history, the mystery of his manifold wisdom to be revealed in the fullness of time, judgments against his enemies and salvation for his people in the coming chapter of Revelation. Centuries before God has said to his prophet in Daniel 12:4, “shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end.” Now the sealed scroll is in the hand of God, in full view of all of heaven.

John is riveted. He wants to know what’s in the scroll. What mysteries does God have to reveal? What wisdom of God, what purposes for history, might now be made known in this scroll? Then John hears “a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’”

Now, at this point, it might be tempting to run right through verses 3 and 4, and miss the weight of this moment in heaven. This is what we do during the seasons of Advent and Lent: we feel the weight of waiting. Instead of racing ahead to Christmas, or Easter, we prepare our hearts by pausing to feel some of the longing and ache of what God’s people felt for centuries as they waited for the promised Messiah. Or the horror and utter devastation of what his disciples felt in the horrors of Good Friday and in what must have seemed like the longest day in the history of the world on Holy Saturday. The pause, the waiting, helps us see and enjoy Jesus as the supreme Treasure he is.

So the angel asks, Who is worthy to open the book? And verse 3 says, “no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.” No one in heaven. None of the four great

creatures around the throne. None of the angelic elders in heaven who lead in worship. None of the angels, in all the heavenly host. Not Gabriel. Not Michael. And get this: not even the one sitting on the throne opens the scroll. Not the Father. Not the Spirit. So heaven waits. How long did they wait?

And if no one in heaven, then of course, no one on the earth or under the earth. Kings of earth, beware. None is worthy to open God's scroll. Mere humans like us are not worthy to unveil his great mystery. Satan, be warned; demons, beware, with whatever power you wield for now, you are not able to open the scroll. And so heaven waits. "No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it."

John begins to weep. And not just weep, but loudly. Perhaps he even wonders, *What about Jesus?* Verse 4: "I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it." John doesn't tell us how long he wept, but it must not have been long. He says, "He *began* to weep." Mercifully, the announcement soon came.

In verse 5 — I love this moment — one of the elders of heaven, one of the leaders in heavenly worship, turns to John and says,

> 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.

So, now through the lens of verses 5–6, let's look together now at three aspects of the longing and aches of our souls fulfilled in Jesus, our Treasure.

##1. We long for majesty and might.

We long to see and admire and benefit from greatness. And the voice rings out in verse 5, “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered.”

“Lion of Judah” signifies that this is the long-promised king of Israel, the Messiah. In Genesis 49, as the patriarch Jacob neared death, he prophesied over each of his twelve sons, and said to Judah that his tribe would be heir to the throne and, in time, produce the nation’s kings:

> Judah, your brothers shall praise you Judah is a lion’s cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. (Genesis 49:8–10)

Like a lion, Judah’s offspring will rule. Lionlike he will be king, with majesty and might. (And just so we don’t get the wrong impression of this rule, Judah received this honor not because of raw strength but self-sacrifice. He stepped forward [to be the pledge of safety](#) to redeem Benjamin from prison.).

“Root of David” is much the same, prophesied centuries later, in Isaiah 11:1, which we often read during Advent: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse [David’s father], and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”

So, Jesus is first shown to be majestic and mighty. He is king, ruler, judge. He is sovereign, and fulfills our longings for greatness, for a ruler strong and mighty, to impress us with power and win our trust and protect us and provide for us and give us life.

But we not only long for a great human king. We long for God himself. And this Lion of Judah is not just Messiah, a human king. He is God himself.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) famously spoke of an “infinite abyss” in every human soul. We try to fill it with all the wonders and the worst this world has to offer. But that ache in us, that restlessness, that infinite abyss in us, can only be filled by the infinite God himself. As Augustine famously said, God made us for himself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him.

So, I ask you this morning: Have you found your soul’s rest in God? Have you found what your soul hungers for in his eternal, divine excellencies? Are you still searching? Are you still thirsty? Have you found the One in whom your soul, in all the ups and downs of this life, will be satisfied forever? Or perhaps did you learn it in the past but you now desperately need to come back to it? Behold the Lion of Judah.

God wired your soul for him. Hard as you may try, you will not be truly, deeply, enduringly happy without him.

We long for majesty and might, and Jesus is the Lion.

##2. We long for meekness and nearness.

Look at verse 6. Having just heard the announcement in verse 5 about the worthiness of the Lion, John turns, and what does he see?

> . . . between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain . . .

In verse 5, John heard *Lion*, but in verse 6, John sees *Lamb*. And this is no disappointment. This is not a loss. This is gain. This is an addition.

Jesus is the Lion of Judah, and no less, but he is also the slain Lamb. The Lion became Lamb, and gave himself to slaughter, that he might rescue his people. His lamb-ness doesn't take away from his lion-ness; it *adds* to it.

Jesus is not only majestic and mighty. He is meek and near, lowly, among us, as one of us. We not only want to see greatness from afar; we long to know greatness personally. We not only want a hero to admire. We ache for a brother to be at our side, a companion, a friend. And Jesus, as Lamb, is Emmanuel, God with us. With us as one of us. With us to sacrifice himself for us. With us to shed his own blood that we might be forgiven. With us to befriend us.

God designed our souls not only for his greatness, but also his nearness, and his meekness.

You might ask, If Jesus is already God, and has been from eternity, what does his humanity have to add to his being our treasure? His divine excellencies are infinite. Yet we are human, and his becoming human exposes to our view glories we otherwise would not see. This is why we love the beautiful paradoxes of Jesus. His paradoxes don't take away from his glory; they *add* to it.

In 1734, Jonathan Edwards preached a famous sermon on "[The Excellency of Christ](#)." In it, he says,

> Christ has no more excellency in his person, since his incarnation, than he had before; for divine excellency is infinite, and cannot be added to. Yet his human excellencies are additional manifestations of his glory and excellency *to us*, and are additional recommendations of him *to our esteem and love* [to be our treasure!], who are of finite comprehension. . . . The glory of

Christ in . . . his human nature, appears to us in excellencies that are of our own [human] kind, and are exercised in our own way and manner, and so, in some respect, are *peculiarly fitted to invite our acquaintance and draw our affection* [our treasuring him]. . . . (emphasis added)

So, the Lion, in becoming Lamb — the eternal Son in becoming man — while not enhancing his divine worth, became even more a Treasure to us, who long for meekness and nearness, for a brother and friend.

##3. In Jesus, we have it all in one person.

It is one thing to see and enjoy the divine excellencies of unmatched strength and knowledge. And another to see and enjoy the human excellencies of humility and friendship. And then, greatest of all, is to see and enjoy divine and human excellencies in one person. Because when majesty and meekness come together in one person they accent each other. As Edwards says, they “set off and recommend each other.”

See it first in verse 6: John says he “saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes.” This Lamb is not dead. He is not slumped over. He is not kneeling. He is standing, alive and ready. And he has seven horns — signifying the fullness of his strength and power. And seven eyes, meaning he sees and rules all. Nothing is hidden from him. That he is Lamb makes his lionlike work, from Revelation 6, through the rest of the book, all the more glorious.

For the rest of Revelation, *Lamb* will be the main title for Jesus, as he displays his power and strength again and again. Just a sample:

- We’re told it is the Lamb who has *conquered* to open the scroll and seals, 5:5; 6:1; 8:1
- The lowly Lamb ransomed people for God from *every* tribe, 5:9

- The humble Lamb is declared Worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing, 5:12–13
- The four living creatures and the angels of heaven fall down and worship *the Lamb*, 5:8, 14
- Unbelievers tremble before the wrath of the Lamb, 6:16
- The robes of the saints are made white in his blood, with his power to forgive, 7:14
- His blood conquers the accuser of the brothers, 12:11
- And the Lamb, in all his meekness, is seated on the throne of heaven (7:9, 10) and in the midst of the throne, 22:1, 3

And of course, we not only admire the Lamb for his lionlike strength and power, but also the Lion for his lamblike gentleness and lowliness, that he gives his own neck for our rescue.

> A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench. (Matthew 12:20; Isaiah 42:3)

As Revelation 1:4–5 says, Jesus is not only the lionlike “ruler of kings on earth”; lamblike, he is also “him who loves us and has freed us from our sin by his blood.”

We admire his greatness all the more in his nearness to us, as one of us. And we enjoy his nearness all the more because of his greatness. Because he is the Lamb, and has drawn near to save us, we can enjoy his lionlike majesty and holiness, without shaking in terror. And because he is the Lion, and wields the very power of God almighty, we can enjoy his lamblike humility and meekness and obedience to his Father, as man, without our worrying that he’s powerless to help his friends.

Friends of First Pres, God designed our souls for Jesus. Not just a divine Father, and not just a human friend, but God himself in human flesh. God himself, in the person of his Son, becoming one of us — God with us, as fully God and fully man, in one spectacular person.

He is not only our Lord. And not only our Savior. He is our Treasure. He is the Pearl of Greatest Price. He is the one of surpassing value, for whom we consider all else loss. He is the Treasure hidden in the field worthy selling all to have. Eternal life is to know him — the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3).

You were not only made for God, but for the God-man, who loved us and gave himself up for us, slain for us, and rose again to be our living, knowable, enjoyable King.