

Revelation 5

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[0 : 00] Revelation chapter 5. The last time I was with you, which was three weeks ago now, we are in Revelation chapter 4, and we were paying attention to the fact that in chapter 4, the angels, the created beings, the saints are joining in a hymn of praise to the Lord God Almighty.

And then we come to chapter 5, and we see similar themes, but this time it's a hymn of praise to Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

So let's read Revelation 5 together. This is God's Word. Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.

And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.

I wept and wept because no one was found who is worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed.

[1 : 25] He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. Then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.

He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the lamb.

Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song. You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you are slain.

And with your blood, you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands and 10,000 times 10,000. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.

[2 : 33] In a loud voice, they sang, worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them singing, to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever.

The four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshiped. This is God's word.

To look at this chapter and to think about this hymn or these hymns to our worthy Savior. That's the question that runs all through this chapter.

It's an important question. Who is worthy? We have other times where that question is asked. In our stories, sometimes in our legends.

[3 : 36] Think about the legend of King Arthur. Remember Excalibur, the sword in the stone. And the question in the kingdom of Britain was, Who is worthy to pass the test?

Who is worthy to remove the sword from the stone? Who will be shown to be the true and rightful king of Britain? Who is worthy in our legends?

At this time in our nation's life, politicians are trying to answer the question for us. Who is worthy? By saying, I am worthy of your vote.

Or rather, if the pamphlets that you get are anything like the ones that come through our door. Rather, it's all those other groups are not worthy of your vote.

They don't have the right opinion. So you need to vote for us. We can offer you this wonderful future. Or whatever that might look like along party political lines.

[4 : 39] Well, here's the question in Revelation 5. And it's far bigger than anything tied up to our politics. It's far bigger than a legend.

The question is, who is worthy? Who is God's rightful king? And who can represent him? Who can bring God's glorious future that he has promised to his people to come to pass?

Is anyone worthy to destroy evil once and for all and establish a kingdom of perfect goodness to establish the kingdom of God? Is anyone worthy?

That's the question. That's why the question matters. It's why the identity of the worthy one matters. It mattered to the first century church.

Remember, this was written to John. Visions given to John the Baptist for a suffering church beginning to face persecution. They were being told to hold on, to persevere because Jesus has triumphed.

[5 : 50] He is the one who is worthy. And this is true for us as well in the 21st century because we too suffer. We too struggle. We do still have problems.

We wonder who will bring this to an end. Who will bring that hope that I am longing for? And again, the identity of the Lion Lamb matters for us and for our worship.

So let's look at this question that's asked by the angels. Who is worthy? If you look at verses 1 and 2, the issue is who is worthy to open this scroll?

So there is in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And the question is who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?

So what's going on here with this scroll? What is it? The scroll is a royal document. It's in the hands of God, the Father in heaven. It's a royal document.

[6 : 52] It's been sealed with the royal seal. So it's only able to be opened by authorized personnel. And so that's where the question comes from.

That's where the tension comes from. Who is authorized to take it and open it? What's the contents of the scroll? That's really what the rest of the book of Revelation tells us about.

It's about God's plans for the ends of the world, for the end of the world. In chapters 6 to 20, you see a large focus on God's plan to bring final judgment and to bring an end to evil.

And tied up with that, there is also God's plan to bring final salvation for God's people. We see God's final intention to establish the new heavens and the new earth, this perfectly restored earth where God will live with and among his people forever.

So that's the content of the scroll. But the question is, who is able to unlock? Who is able to bring it to pass? Look at verse 3.

[8 : 02] Here's the tension. No one in heaven or earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. This is a big deal. It's such a big deal that it causes John to weep.

Why is it such a big deal? Because no angel, no human has the authority or the ability to bring about God's purposes. And if there is no one to complete God's purposes, then there is no end to evil and suffering.

There is no glory in the final kingdom of God. And so John in his suffering state, he wants that and therefore he weeps at the thought that there is no one who is worthy.

For you and for me, I'm sure we recognize that the world is both a place of beauty and a place of ugliness, a place of joy and a place of sorrow.

We see it so often in our national news. We feel it in our own personal experience. And we have these longings deep within us. We want a place where justice is done and we feel the pain of injustice.

[9 : 14] We want to live in a world that's marked by perfect peace, both politically and in terms of personal relationships. We all long in our hearts that love would not come to an end.

We want the world that God is about to bring to pass according to Revelation, a world without sickness and suffering and disease and pain and death.

And the question, is there a possibility of us getting that world we all want? Is there anyone who is worthy? Is there anyone who can answer our longings?

Is there anyone who can bring ultimate hope beyond the despair that we often feel? Where can such a person be found who is worthy?

It brings us immediately to the answer. John is not left to weep for long. Verse 5, one of the elders said to me, do not weep.

[10:16] See, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.

Who is worthy? The lion who is also the lamb, King Jesus. He is worthy. Jesus comes with the authority of God.

This great lion, he comes to fulfill the promises of God. Jesus, the lion lamb, has come to establish the happily ever after for the people of God.

To give us the certain hope of that world that we all long for. And this from the angels comes as good news for John. And it comes as good news for us today.

Because one has been found who is worthy. Revelation is full of images and pictures. And we have a couple of them here. And the one who is worthy is the lion of the tribe of Judah.

[11:16] And of course, when we think of lions, we think of majesty. We think of might. We think of kingship. This lion is going to rule with majesty and power.

In the Old Testament, Judah was described as the lion, the great king to come. David, attention focused then on David as the great king.

But after David, there was the hope towards the end of the Old Testament that the Messiah, the Savior, he would be this great king, this great lion.

Gives us the hope of the coming of Jesus. And look at the way it's put in verse 5. The lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed.

So again, we're going to read lots of battles. If you read Revelation, you read lots of battles, lots of conflict between darkness and light and good and evil. But the lion has triumphed.

[12:20] Our hope is rooted in a past act that has secured certain victory. So important for us as Christians to be able to hold on to that.

To recognize that our circumstances, difficult as they might be, they do not change the victory of Jesus. They do not change the fact that the lion has triumphed.

That his final and ultimate victory is never in hope, in doubt. So we might find ourselves sometimes in very dark places. We might find ourselves living with very real despair and fear for our future.

And that's when we need to go back to the reality of the gospel. We need to go deeper into this wonderful truth that the lion has triumphed for his people.

Where has he done it? He did it at the cross. The cross is where sin and death and the devil have been defeated. The cross is the place where forgiveness has been secured.

[13:28] The cross is the place where eternal life is granted. The cross is where we find hope beyond suffering and death. Because Jesus didn't stay dead.

He then rose three days later. This lion has triumphed. But he's not just a lion.

The image changes in verse 6. Then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.

This lion is this lamb. The lamb slaughtered and sacrificed. And again, John uses more Old Testament imagery than any other.

Revelation uses more Old Testament imagery than any other book of the Bible. In the Old Testament, we can think of the Passover lamb. That lamb that was slain so that the judgment of God might pass over the houses of Israel.

[14:37] Or we might think of the sacrificial system and the sin offerings. Where when a person had sinned against God's law, they could bring an animal and take that animal to the priest and slaughter the animal.

Having placed their hand on the head of the animal as if to signal, here is sin being transferred from the guilty person to the animal. The animal dying in the place of the sinful person so that forgiveness could happen.

Or we think of Isaiah's suffering servant, the lamb who was led to the slaughter. The lamb who would die so that we might live.

This lamb looking as if it had been slain points us to the saving work of Jesus on the cross. There's where victory is found.

There's where hope is won. But you also get in Revelation 5 a wonderful picture of Jesus now. So we think about Jesus on the cross then, but Jesus now in heaven.

[15 : 51] What's the picture there? We see him standing in the center of the throne receiving all the worship and the glory of heaven. It's so important that we remember our risen and ascended and glorious King Jesus now.

We see him all powerful. He's got these seven horns, symbols of power. He's all knowing and all seeing. He has those seven eyes.

And he's directing the spread of the gospel. He's directing the growth of the church as he sends his spirit through the earth. So a wonderful picture of Jesus now enthroned in glory, ruling and reigning for his people to build his church through that victory won at the cross.

The lion is the lamb. Jesus becomes the king of all majesty by becoming the suffering lamb.

And so again and again you see in the book of Revelation, the cross is the center of human history. It is the place of decisive victory.

[17 : 09] It is the hope for an end to evil and the beginning of the kingdom of God. Here's why John does not need to weep. Here's how our tears can be met with hope.

The lion lamb and his victory at the cross. Jesus, the worthy hero at the heart of the Bible story.

What's the big story of the Bible? We can go back to the beginning. In the beginning, God established a perfect world. And the pinnacle of his creation was people, men and women, made in the image of God with value and dignity and made to know and enjoy God.

And so into this perfect world were established people. And those first people, Adam and Eve, they enjoyed perfect relationships. Perfect relationship with the created world, always at peace with the environment.

Perfect relationship with one another. No fighting, no gossip, no jealousy, no hatred. And perfect relationship with the God who made them.

[18 : 17] God walking and talking with them, knowing them, giving them friendship, having given them life. But then, as we read the story of the Bible, we discover sin comes.

The serpent comes and deceives the man and the woman. And they are tempted to believe that freedom is found apart from life with God.

That there is more joy to be found ignoring the word of God. And believing that the devil is a friend. And God is their enemy who's holding back his best from them.

And so sin comes in their pride and their desire to be God-like. Sin comes in their rebellion and the rejection of the word of God. And all of that good becomes broken.

But into that brokenness comes God's promise. Way back in Genesis 3, God announces the gospel. God said his rescuer would come.

[19 : 20] One who would suffer, but who would crush the head of the serpent. One who would defeat the work of the devil. So from the beginning, it has always been God's plan to send Jesus, this lion lamb, to be our rescuer.

To be our savior king. The one who would come to suffer in our place for our sin. The one who would then rise in victory to rule. And the one who will return to make everything new.

To restore all that we lost because of our sin. And to give us back life with God that lasts forever in perfect love.

So the gospel gives us hope. The gospel says, yes, we suffer. But yes, we can at the same time sing. If we are trusting in this Jesus, the lion lamb.

If we have asked him to forgive our sins and to be our savior. And then we get a response. This is where we get to the hymns.

[20 : 33] The hymns to our worthy king in verses 9 to 14. This year, on the 21st of February, we were part of, a very small part of, an event organized by Keith and Kristen Getty.

They are hymn writers. Globally recognized hymn writers. They organize, I think, every year called a Global Hymn Sing. So this year, they estimate over 1 million people from 77 countries in 32 different languages on that one Sunday, 21st of February, all sang, different times, Jesus shall reign wherever the sun does its successive journeys run.

Now imagine, just for a moment, what it would have been like if those 1 million plus people could have gathered in one place to sing with one voice that great hymn to Jesus the King.

It's hard to imagine that million people. Do you know what? That's just a whisper compared to the roar of praise that we're being presented with in Revelation 5. Look at who is singing here in Revelation 5, verse 8.

We discover that the four living creatures begin to sing a new song. We saw back in Revelation 4, that's a picture of created beings.

[21 : 56] So they're joining to sing praise. Verse 8 also has the 24 elders falling down before the Lamb to worship and to sing. That was a picture of the Old Testament and the New Testament church.

So they're joining in this theme of praise. And then in verse 11, I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands and 10,000 times 10,000.

I saw the worship of heaven. Jesus receives the worship of heaven. And then verse 13, Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that's in them. Everything.

Saying Jesus is worthy. Jesus is this great and worthy king. The one who is promised. The one who can bring about God's purposes.

The one who can end evil and restore the kingdom of God. Why do they sing? Not just a global hymn sing.

[22 : 55] Why this universal hymn sing? Three reasons we can detect from their songs. Verse 9. First reason, redemption. You are worthy because you were slain.

And with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. Jesus is worthy of this new song because his death, the death of Jesus on the cross, means the ransom price has been paid.

Means freedom for the people of God. Means sin has been atoned for, has been paid for so that reconciliation can take place. And they sing.

They sing and they tell us this is good news for anyone who will hear and believe. This is not just for some small corner. This is for the whole globe. Men, women, boys and girls from every tribe and language and people and nation.

And it's wonderful. So on Wednesday we had our national day of prayer. It was fascinating to do some study on the growth of the global church. Jesus is building his church. Sometimes really, really rapid growth in the most surprising places.

[24 : 09] Iran, Afghanistan, Nepal. Some of the most persecuted places are also the places where the church is growing the fastest. But there are still over 2 billion people who are unreached.

And so there is still work to be done. And so we still need to hear the call to mission and to recognize our part in that.

For some of us, our response will be to give. To give of our financial resources. And we should do that.

Our response as Christians should also be to pray. To pray for the extension of the church of Jesus around the globe. But perhaps, too, for some of us, our response will be to go.

You know, we pray that God would raise up new workers. Perhaps some of us will be those new workers. Jesus is praised because of the redemption that he secured because of his death on the cross.

[25 : 13] And that's good news for everyone who will hear and believe. So they sing because of redemption. But they also sing because of the wonderful transformation that Jesus brings to the lives of his people.

From slavery, you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God. And they will reign on the earth. Slaves to citizens of a new kingdom.

The shame of slavery replaced by the glory of being kings and queens and priests of our God. And again, notice, you have made them.

This isn't something we can do for ourselves. We are made new people by the grace and the kindness of God in sending Jesus to be the Savior.

So they sing this new song of the wonderful transformation. But that song also reminds us of our responsibilities. If we're Christians here today, we've been made to be a kingdom.

[26 : 20] God's our king. We've been made to represent his values in his world. We've been made to represent God. To be his witnesses. To be his priests.

To live lives of worship on Sunday, yes. But all of our lives. To live acknowledging the worthiness of God.

Live lives recognizing, responding to the glory of the Lord Jesus. So we worship and we witness.

And we pray. We bring before God others. Others who don't know the glory of Jesus as yet. Those who don't see the hope that he brings.

Oh, perfect life beyond death as well as perfect love in this life. So we have responsibilities. And Jesus calls his church to be his people.

[27 : 22] But he also sends us out into frontline mission and service. So Jesus is praised because of the redemption that he brings.

He's praised because of the wonderful transformation that he brings in the lives of his people. But finally, Jesus is praised simply because of who he is.

Look at verse 12. Worthy is the lamb who was slain. To receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

Jesus deserves worship because of who he is. Because he is supreme. We see in verse 13. He is fully God. He shares worship.

He sits on the throne with the father. So he deserves our praise. He deserves our praise because he loves us. And he gave himself for us.

[28 : 21] And so what Revelation does and what these hymns do for us is they bring together the identity of Jesus and the response that that should bring, which is worship. So that we would recognize clearly that this lion lamb who's being presented is worthy of all of the praise of all of our hearts.

Revelation is showing us. Revelation is showing us at the center of history stands the suffering and the death of Jesus.

Stands his victory. Stands his victory for his people, for his church. Jesus is the worthy one. He is the great and worthy hero of the great story of the Bible.

I wonder how does our story connect with that of Jesus, this worthy hero. What we have here is all of creation joining together to acknowledge Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is King. But the Bible makes clear to us that people will do that for very different reasons. The Bible says on that day when Jesus returns as King and as judge, some people will bow the knee and acknowledge Jesus as King with great joy.

[29 : 44] They get to see their Savior and to be with him forever. It's the Christian response. But we're also told that some will bow the knee to King Jesus, acknowledging he's King, but doing it very reluctantly.

They never wanted him as King. They never responded to him as King. And so they bow the knee, acknowledging him as King. But he is also the one who will judge. So Revelation presents hope for us.

There is hope beyond suffering. There is hope beyond death. But it depends on us bowing the knee to King Jesus now, today. Because as we see the story of Revelation unfold, God's purposes for the world are both judgment and salvation.

And which storyline defines our life depends on how we respond to King Jesus. Will we receive his offer of salvation? Will we join his family, receive these wonderful privileges that he promises to us? Will we join this global hymn sing to this worthy hero?