

# Revelation 5

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[ 0 : 00 ] Then I saw on the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, weep no more. Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the roots of David, has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.

And between the throne and the four living creatures 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 into all the world.

And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

[ 1 : 10 ] 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.

And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth. Then I looked and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, the voice of many angels numbering myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the lamb who is slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

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.

And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshiped. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Just a couple of words before I begin to my dear brother who returns to Ghana this week and labors for the Lord.

Remember, your colors hang here. Your colors hang here. And we await that day when we stand before the throne again and sing to him.

[ 2 : 50 ] Serve him faithfully, my dear friend. Amen. Secondly, we have a chapter that I could probably preach on for three hours.

It would be of no great pain to me. However, at 6 o'clock I am to be at a church about 40 miles from here as there is a church being planted and I am responsible to give the charge to that congregation.

And so perhaps of some benefit to you, the sermon will be shorter than three hours. But if you think I'm rude for charging out afterwards, it's merely because I have a charge yet to give.

Some of you might remember Doug O'Donnell. He came down with our original core and started this church about 10 years ago. And this evening he has a congregation that is being founded and sent to plant a church in Naperville.

And John Dennis is already on his way there, I am sure, for he is taking part and I will follow. Dr. Martinez, David Martinez, is a member of our congregation.

[ 4 : 06 ] He teaches classics here at the University of Chicago. And a while ago I had some reason to inquire of him about ancient documents.

He spends his days in ancient documents. He is a lover of first century Greek manuscripts. And in trying to ascertain what those might look like for the modern reader today, he wrote me kindly and

said, ancient letters, after they were written on a sheet of papyrus, were rolled up and folded. The writer would have torn away one of the fibers of the papyrus and tied the letter together, keeping in mind that the papyrus sheet was made from cutting strips from the triangular stalk of the papyrus plant and then interposing a horizontal layer of strips on a vertical layer and then pounding the two together.

The juices from the plant itself acted as a kind of adhesive to hold the two layers together. Writing was usually done on the recto side, which is the side with the fibers running horizontal.

The body of the letter would thus be hidden. On the outside, that is, the verso side of the papyrus, where the fibers run vertically, would be written the name of the one to whom the letter was addressed.

[ 5 : 36 ] Then he went on, not just to talk about scrolls, but to speak to me concerning the seals. And he said, in the case of more important correspondence concerning important matters of business or letters between government officials, instead, or in addition to tying up the letter, a seal would be affixed.

A lump of wax, which was then stamped with the official imprint of the sender. This seal would be very carefully scrutinized by the recipient before the letter was opened and its contents were read and carried out to ensure that the seal was unbroken and authentic.

In fact, in that ancient day, the ancient Jewish world, the matter not only of the making of letters and the sealing of the envelope, as it were, were different than our contemporary manner, so also was the sending and receiving of letters.

There was no real full-time postal service in play. There was the imperial postal service, but that was reserved for important officials. Your mail or my mail would have had to get through another way.

More often than not, it would have just happened to have been brought by one who was traveling that way. Well, what a difference between our world and God's.

[ 7 : 10 ] Revelation chapter 5 and verse 1, we see a scroll and a seal and a delivery of mail, but we find that we are in manuscripts unknown to us.

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.

And I saw an angel, a strong angel, proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals.

The chapter opens with an angel asking in a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals.

This scroll, as well as the delivery of it, are unlike any common first century letter or parchment.

[ 8 : 15 ] This is brought into the presence of John, the writer, who himself, according to chapter 4, verse 1, had been gathered up through a vision in the Spirit into the very heavenlies and the throne room of God.

Brought to the letter rather than the letter brought to him. And he was there, and we were already given some hint, even in chapter 4, in regard to the content of the letter and the seal.

Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. And we will see that the content of the scroll and the seals in the ensuing weeks, as they move from chapter 5 all the way into chapter 8, are nothing less than God's judgments being rolled out upon the world and His created order.

The question comes from the throne room, who is worthy to execute and unfold the righteous ways of God upon the earth.

It can be interpreted to mean, who is worthy to carry out God's will and action for all of creation.

[ 9 : 39 ] And certainly it must be intimately connected to the pronouncement that we saw last week in chapter 4, verse 11, where we saw the 24 elders and the four creatures falling before God and saying, 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. And so God has already been proclaimed worthy of glory, honor, power from all of creation, for He is their Creator.

And out of that great declaration rolls then the scroll from the very throne of God and His right hand. And who then is worthy to bring His will and His glory into all of that which He has created.

The tragic verses of the chapter are 3 and 4. And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.

And I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look into it. Who is worthy?

[10:54] No one is worthy. The great pronouncement in the heavens is met with the silence and the problem upon the earth. Not only are the divinely appointed representatives, the 24 in number, incapable of opening it, but all that which they represent are unworthy of opening.

Not only are the four living creatures whose manifestation represents all of God's created being and order, not only are they unable, but the creatures on the earth and under the earth and within the earth, they themselves are unable.

No one is able to establish God's rule. No one is able to secure God's purposes. No one is able to put down earth's rebellion which has arisen from the garden all the way to our streets.

Ours is a prodigal world. Ours is a prodigal world. We have all stolen some of God's glory for ourselves, yet the declaration from the throne was worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory.

We have all borrowed His honor without any intention of ever returning it back unto Him, and yet the Scriptures say, Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive honor.

[12:27] We have all usurped His power and wielded it unto our own interest, and yet the worthy declaration, the pronouncement in heaven, says, Worthy are you to receive all power.

Who is worthy? No one worthy. No, not one. No one deserving. No one entitled. No one fit. No one ready. No one prepared.

No one able to carry out the will of God in the world. Universal silence. And he weeps.

I wonder why he weeps. This son of man, whoever he might be, this John, this one carried up from the island of Patmos. Could it be that he's fully aware that humankind was created with the intention of God to carry out His plans in the world?

That of all the created order, it was man, male and female, who in the image of God He created them. They were to go forth from the garden and the rivers flowing forth unto all creation, and they were to, in a sense, abound His kingdom to the ends of the earth.

[13:53] Why does humanity weep? Because humanity of all His creation was intended to step forward and bring God's will into the world.

The fact that we weep so little is an indication of how far fallen we are from a recognition of the glory with which we were created.

we are content, content to bring some glory into the world, to have some place of honor, to accrue some measure of power, but on such a limited scale, such an individual notion, God stands in the heavens.

we have, as you might say in the language of literature, dirty hands.

That was Macbeth, wasn't it? For those of you who enjoy Shakespeare, out damned spot, out I say.

[15:24] who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? Wash your hands, put on your nightgown, look not so pale, I tell you yet again, he's buried, he cannot come out on his grave, to bed, to bed, there's a knocking at the gate, come, come, come, give me your hand, come, what's done cannot be undone, to bed, to bed, to bed.

If you don't like Shakespeare, and I know some of you don't, if you don't like the Elizabethan era, perhaps you like the existentialists instead.

And so I bring you Sartre, who in his own play, Dirty Hands, has hoarder saying how you cling to your purity, young man, how afraid you are to soil your hands, alright, stay pure, do nothing, remain motionless, arms at your side, wearing kid's glove, well, I have dirty hands, right up to the elbows, I've plunged them in filth and blood, but what do you hope?

Do you think you can govern innocently? Dirty Hands. And so every week we arrive on Sunday at four and for a moment within the congregational prayer we confess our sins.

For oh Lord, I have sinned against you in thought, in word, and in deed. The scroll stands fixed in the right hand of the one on the throne and the great angel comes forth into all of heaven and proclaims, who is worthy?

[17:25] No one is worthy. The prodigal world falls silent. And yet we know all the way from chapter 1 and verse 1 that the anticipated answer is going to be there is one worthy, Jesus Christ.

There's no wondering in the mind of the reader at this point of the apocalypse concerning whether or not humanity will be destitute to fall under the wrath of God immeasurably and without end forever and ever.

Don't you remember some weeks ago when we began the opening words, the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show to His servants the things that must soon take place?

And we notice that when it mentioned the revelation of Jesus Christ, it implied and meant indeed wants to say that this is the revelation of all that belongs to Christ.

Of all that is rightly His. That which the Father has given Him. And so even in our weakness, even in our frailties, even in your fallenness, and even in the midst of your tears, the reader himself or herself is already running in soul to the Lamb who sits on the throne.

[ 18 : 58 ] No one may be worthy but one who has come from heaven who is worthy. The text moves with this great expectation that we will read about one who we understand to be no one other than Jesus who is the Christ.

And the text does not fail us. Verse 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. Those two descriptive phrases which identify our Lord Jesus Christ.

Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, of course, for those of you who have read the Old Testament at any length at all will know that the very promise of God after the fall was that He would rescue all of humanity by anointing one who would be king, who would come from the line of Abraham.

And as the Torah closes, or Genesis, its first book within it closes, that expectation is rooted and the scepter is handed through the benedictions of Jacob upon his sons to Judah, the fourthborn, who is called the Lion, the one from Judah.

[ 20 : 26 ] And the scepter will not pass from his hand. And so, from the very beginning, the reader of the Scriptures, perhaps you yourself for the first time ought to begin to see that all of the message of the Bible from the very beginning of it to the end of it has been moving to the fulfillment of this promise that one would come from Judah to rescue the souls of men.

Indeed, then, isn't it wonderful when we know that David, who represents all of the goodness of Israel's kingdom, is a Bethlehemite, that he arises, as it were, from the context of Judah, that Joseph in Luke's narrative in chapter 2, I believe, we begin to see that he himself, Jesus, was born from the line of Judah.

In Hebrews 7, verse 14, confirms this for us. Indeed, our church has been studying Hebrews over the last weeks. And in Hebrews 7, we see this declaration in verse 14.

For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah. All of the narrative points to him as fulfillment.

the identity of the root of David, of course, traces its own history back at least to Isaiah and his Isianic prophecies concerning one that would come forth from the stump of Jesse.

[ 22 : 12 ] That he would indeed come from the root of David. Isaiah 11, 1-3, and verse 10. And then later, we know from Revelation, the apocalypse itself, in chapter 22, and verse 16, that it is Jesus of Nazareth who was the Christ who was referred to in Revelation 22 as the one who is the root of David.

And so, the reader is not wondering concerning the identity of the individual. Weep no more.

Behold, the promised one, the scepter, the ruler from the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.

These two phrases, then, the lion and the root, are emblematic of a ruler, a king, a conquering one. One who is able to enter into the world and to put down all of the rebellion under God's word, to rightly execute his justice and his righteousness, to bring God's intended plans to fruition, one and only one, this one, his anointed king, his conquering ruler, and son.

So then, when he looks, verse 6, to see this one, this one, well, what does he see but the lamb?

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, with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

[ 23 : 57 ] The description is of a lion, a ruling, conquering king. The image is of a lamb standing as though it had been slain.

The seven horns, of course, emblematic of complete and full power and authority. the seven eyes, which are descriptively, interpretively given as the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

This is the one who is slain and anointed by the spirit. And in contrast to the lion of the tribe of Judah and the root of David, which speaks of a conquering ruler, here we have a suffering savior.

And when he hears of one, he sees the other. And the images of scripture are brought together that God's conquering king is none other than his suffering servant.

And that the lion is the lamb and the lamb the lion. And they all meet in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we move in the text very quickly from the no one of verses one to four to this one in verses five to seven.

[ 25 : 14 ] This one alone is worthy to carry out God's will upon the earth. Only Jesus Christ is strong enough to defeat and carry out God's plan. Only Jesus is capable of defeating God's enemies.

Only Jesus is capable of redeeming God's creation. And the progression is not yet complete. From no one to this one and finally to everyone in verses eight to fourteen who will give him praise.

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 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 a people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth.

I begin to say I would begin to call this the heavenly circle is the first to respond. They are the early adopters of the glories of Christ.

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders now sing and they sing what? A new song. Well, what was the old song?

[ 26 : 46 ] Well, for my part, I think it's chapter 4 verse 11. Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things.

That's the old song that they were singing. And the new song doesn't just proclaim worthiness to God, for creation. It now proclaims a worthiness to the Lamb for salvation.

You see the difference in the two songs? Worthy are you, our Lord and God, for you created all things. And verse 9, worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals, for you were slain.

It's a very interesting thing that we praise God for creation and salvation. And there's a very important point here. If you're early into reading the Bible and wondering whether or not you're going to lay down your life and begin following Jesus as God's King, the scriptures here are clear that he's worthy of that response from you and from me.

For it describes worship to Jesus, a worship that previously had been limited to God himself. Jesus receives the praise normally reserved for God.

[ 28 : 14 ] That's the way it always is in the Bible. So if you're wondering how you begin living your life in praise and in worship to God, you begin to sing a new song to Jesus.

Jesus. second, I want you to see that salvation through Christ is connected to his creation of us. When I call people to repentance and faith in Christ, we must rightly ask on what basis should we be repenting and giving our life to Christ?

What claim does he have over me? And this is the interesting point in regarding the Christian gospel. His claim over us stems from his creation of us.

Why ought you follow the Lord Jesus Christ? Because by him and through him all things were created. You owe your very allegiance to the one who created you and as we have seen in our text, was slain and by his blood ransomed a people for God.

So the heavenly circle begins to swell with worthy art thou. And then verse 11 and 12 we begin to see that that early circle begins to widen and the angelic host joins in as well.

[ 29 : 45 ] 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 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 as if the angels themselves not to be outdone by worthy are you to receive glory and honor and power they bring to it wisdom and wealth and might and blessing the rippling praises of God ever expanding in the heavenly circle and then undeniably the text moves from that intimate circle to the angelic host to all of creation joining in do you see it there so clearly put forward in verses 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 isn't that a great contrast when you consider that same phrasing back in verse 3 no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and by verse 13 all that are on earth and in heaven and under the earth and in the sea are

now saying to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever that is the way it rolls in heaven today you might as well come to the party before you come late for every creature will bow every name will confess that Jesus

Christ is Lord to the glory of God let me put it as simply and boldly as I can the corporate worship of God and the ascribing to him of everlasting praise and to the lamb will be the eternal privilege of all who through Christ have a share in this salvation you sit here today and you ask in the midst of the night oh dear Lord God where am I going what am I doing why am I here on a Sunday at four the answer is come thundering forth from God's word you are here having been created by God and redeemed by his son to give him everlasting praise and that is crescendoing through history indeed all of history is moving toward it on that day the day without end

God will finally receive the fullness of praise that is due his name do you notice how everyone has to keep joining in C.S.

Lewis wrote in his reflections on the Psalms quote just as men spontaneously urge us to join them in praising whatever they value so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it I mean I may just interrupt his quote here for a minute my dad is ingeniously ensconced in this when he grills a steak he's so happy with his steak and we begin to cut it and boy this is a good steak isn't this a good steak four bites later Dave this is a good steak isn't it he's always urging others not only to participate in that which he values but to then engender your praise of it too Lewis goes on isn't she lovely wasn't it glorious don't you think that magnificent you see the praising of God in heaven will resemble this very kind of occurrence and it ought to resemble it here and especially when we gather for at a time when

God is supremely valued as certainly he must be so valued in heaven we will all possess the spontaneous urge to speak highly of him in the presence of others not satisfied however we will urge them to join us in praising God for what we see in him and when that occurs the happy ones to whom we have spoken will gladly join us in a ripple of praise will be running throughout the redeemed like rolling mighty waters resulting in new songs that will cascade across the full expanse of heaven and fill all of the created order and the whole earth shall be filled with his glory George Whitefield the 18th century evangelist seemed to be able to throw back the apocalyptic curtain himself on this present world when he wrote think think with what unspeakable glory those happy souls are now encircled who when on earth were called to deny themselves and were not disobedient to the call hark me thinks

[ 35 : 07 ] I hear them chanting their everlasting hallelujahs and spending an eternal day in echoing triumphant songs of joy and do you not long my brethren to join this heavenly choir behold then a heavenly ladder reached down to you by which you may climb to this holy hill by this we even we may be lifted into the same blissful regions and join with them in singing doxologies and songs of praise to the everlasting blessed all glorious most adorable trinity forever and ever well to all of that the four living creatures would say amen and the elders would fall down and worship and the saints upon the earth would arise and sing praises to

God our heavenly father we have seen the veil of the eternal glories pulled back and in it we find the exaltation of your son as our supreme aim help us now then to in this moment in this very moment give you from the fullness of our being glory honor wealth and praise in Christ's name we ask amen to God