

And Worthy is Jesus

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. I encourage you to open the Bibles again at page 997 to the reading from the book of Revelation and last week and today and the next two, a sermon series from Revelation 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Let's pray. God our Father, open our eyes to see your glory and the glory of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may be strengthened to follow him all our days on earth. And one day be in your eternal glorious presence singing your praises. Amen. Last week, if you were here and remember, we were taken behind the scenes to the control room of history. John saw a door open in heaven and was beckoned to enter and taken to see God on the throne of heaven and the heavenly inhabitants around God's throne. We saw last week that heaven is God-centered, not us-centered. And heaven also is praise-filled. For the joy of heaven is completed by the praises of God on its throne.

[1 : 15] The vision of heaven that Revelation 4 begins and, in effect, lasts through the rest of this book is a vision for the purpose of strengthening Christians on earth.

It's not there to make us sort of float away in the clouds and to be completely cut off from this world, but rather, in fact, to strengthen us in our life on earth now, so that we may be faithful servants and worshippers, singing the praises of Jesus all our days on earth.

The praise of God that we saw last week is ceaseless, unending day and night. However, if we stop at the end of last week's chapter, the end of chapter 4, the picture of heaven and, indeed, the praise in heaven is deficient.

It's lacking. And in this chapter, chapter 5, into this symphony of praise of God comes some drama and tension that ultimately leads to the greater completion of the praise in heaven.

What we saw last week was a bit of a collage of Old Testament imagery and ideas, as, indeed, is typical in this book of Revelation. But now we find added into that picture the drama and tension of history, the drama and tension of the whole Bible story told now to us in a simple imagery.

[2 : 55] In fact, this tension of history, that is that there's a distance created between God who is holy, holy, holy and fallen humanity.

How is that and will that be bridged? Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back sealed with seven seals.

A scroll, because that would be the way that people would read in those days, rather than with a book. A scroll unusually written on both sides.

It's not open. It's rolled up and sealed with seven seals. We're not sure how John knew or understood that it was written on both sides when it's all rolled up, but he did.

There's a danger in this book, Revelation, which is written in a style of writing called apocalyptic, that we let the imagery and symbolism run mad.

[4 : 02] And you may be familiar with all sorts of rather exotic and bizarre interpretations of bits of this book. And yet it's the book of Revelation, not the book of confusion.

And the symbolism comes largely out of the Old Testament. That is, God is giving John this vision and through John to us, not to lead us astray, not to bamboozle us, not to create an opportunity for a sort of interpreter's picnic and anything goes, but rather the context of the Old Testament and to a limited degree, the context of John's own period of history, the last decade of the first century.

Therein lie the keys to interpret this book. In the Old Testament, there is a scroll written on both sides from the prophet Ezekiel. And in fact, both the prophet Ezekiel and Daniel, where there are other scrolls, are significant precursors to this book.

Many of the ideas in Revelation come out of or relate to the books of the prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel. In Ezekiel 2, this scroll is a scroll of judgment and salvation.

And whilst we're not told in detail why it's on both sides, except that that suggests there's nothing more to be added, judgment and salvation are in the end the flip side of the same activity of God. [5 : 34] On one side judgment, but on the other side of the same events of God comes salvation. This scroll, there's another one in Daniel that was to be kept for a later time.

Now it seems, this scroll is to be open. The one in Daniel is maybe a bit like a time capsule. The scroll suggests and symbolizes the purposes of God.

What God has decreed will happen for this universe. And the time was not yet in Daniel, so it's guarded and kept like a time capsule.

But now in this vision that John has in heaven, it is time to open the scroll. And slitting its seals will not just simply reveal what's going to happen, but actually bring it about as the chapters that follow will show.

So opening the scroll is in a sense fulfilling the purposes of God, allowing them now to happen. But the drama is, who will open the scroll?

[6 : 46] I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

Who is worthy? The last verse of the previous chapter as we saw last week, God is worthy. God who is holy, holy, holy.

Perfect in purity and holiness. He is worthy of praise in heaven. Now comes the question, who is worthy to open the scroll?

Who is worthy to cross past that sea of glass like crystal? To walk between the 24 thrones of the elders? To come up in between the four living creatures to the very throne of God in whose right hand is held this scroll?

Who is worthy to come that close to such a holy, holy, holy God? Who can qualify? Who can approach such a God before whom even angels hide their eyes?

[7 : 54] This is no mean task. Notice that the question is, who is worthy? Not who is brave enough, not who is foolish enough, not who is strong enough.

Indeed, the angel who asked the question is a mighty angel, a powerful angel. If might or power were what was required, then the angel could open the scroll. But the question is, who is worthy? Who is morally pure enough to take from the right hand of God himself on his throne this scroll? Worthy implies worship.

This is a high bar that needs to be overcome. Who is worth the worship? Who can come to this very right hand of God and open the scroll?

But there's no answer to the question. In verse 3, we read that no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll to look into it. No one.

[9 : 02] When we ask questions, say for the children's talks, and you know, who, who, who, hands go up all the time. But here in heaven, who is worthy to open the scroll?

No one. No one at all. No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth. No one is worthy. For all have fallen short.

And as a result, John weeps bitterly. He weeps bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

Could it be that God's purposes are going to be thwarted? Could it be that the fulfilment God wants for this universe cannot happen because no one is worthy to open the scroll?

You see, if God is to triumph, if God's purposes are to happen, somebody, somebody, somebody, somewhere must open the scroll. And no one was found in heaven or on earth or under the earth able to do that.

[10 : 16] It seems in this drama, in this tension of a fallen world so distant from God that God's good purposes cannot be fulfilled.

But no. For then John hears this stunning announcement, an announcement made with excitement in verse 5.

One of the elders said to me, do not weep. See, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.

Literally, what's being said here is he's so overcome by excitement, he says, look, he's triumphed, the lion of Judah. There's short, emphatic exclamations of joy and excitement.

No one was found worthy. But look, suddenly, it's the lion of Judah who has overcome. This is full of Old Testament language and ideas.

[11 : 26] The lion of the tribe of Judah takes us way back to the book of Genesis when Jacob, the patriarch, was blessing his sons before he died. And out, in a prophetic statement, out from the tribe of Judah would rise the scepter.

And here he is. And then the statement about the root of David takes us back to the prophet Isaiah who looked forward to one descended from the great King David to be the Saviour Messiah of the people.

Here he is. The lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, the Old Testament expectations all coming and converging on this figure who has just been announced.

He has triumphed. There's no object to that verb. It's not that he's triumphed over this or that or the other. It's, in a sense, open-ended. This is the ultimate victory.

This is the ultimate triumph over all enemies, all opposition, all sin and evil. This lion of the tribe of Judah is victorious totally and eternally.

[12 : 34] The battle's been fought and won. It's over and done with is the sense of the tense of the verb. It's a complete victory. And the purpose of the victory, the purpose of the triumph is so that he may open the scroll.

We might think that's a slight anti-climax but remember we're dealing with imagery here. The purpose of the victory of the lion of Judah was to bring about the fulfilment of all of God's purposes for the universe.

That is, to open the scroll. And that's what makes him worthy. his triumph. Back in chapters 2 and 3 it's clear that this book of Revelation was written to seven churches in what is modern day western Turkey.

Ephesus, Laodicea, Smyrna, Pergamum and others. Seven churches. But through John's vision and the recording of this book it's actually written to any church who reads this book in any period of history subsequently.

to each of those seven churches was given the exhortation to overcome or to triumph. Same word. For example, the end of chapter 2 to the church of Thyatira to the one who conquers I will also give the morning star.

[13 : 59] The end of chapter 3 to the church of Laodicea to the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne just as I myself conquered and sat down with my father on his throne.

These are letters from Jesus to those churches exhorting them to conquer. But he's not saying you need to become powerful like Superman. He's not saying you conquer by your own inner strength or resolve.

But rather as this book makes abundantly clear we conquer by trusting in the lion who conquers. This book is directing us to trust in him to hold fast to him to overcome to be victorious to triumph in the lion of Judah that is of course in Jesus Christ.

It's an exhortation to hope and faith an exhortation to trust and hold fast. Well John hears this announcement from the one of the 24 elders see he's triumphed the lion of Judah.

So John turns to see. He turns to look and what does he see? A ferocious lion full of power and might.

[15 : 18] Not at all. He sees a lamb almost the opposite of what you'd expect. A lamb helpless weak stupid animal a lamb but you said a lion and I see a lamb.

What's going on? Why the mismatch between what was said and what was seen? It happens a few times in the book of Revelation we'll see it again in two weeks.

Something is proclaimed or announced and when it is seen it is described differently. The device I think is for the benefit of those Christians on earth in those seven churches and to us as well those who read this book.

If we look on earth if we're like the churches of the seven churches here we might be tempted to see a world in which God was absent or weak or defeated.

a world in which the might of the Roman Empire in all its vicious persecution in the last decade of the first century seems to be triumphing over this fledgling church of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 38] It would be very tempting to think as we could in our own day and age if we look at our world and think God's purposes they're not being fulfilled. The church is small it's divided in so many places it's inconsequential there's a growing secularism and atheism and hostility there's growing other religions really can we say that Jesus has triumphed can we say that the church is going to prevail that God's purposes are going to be fulfilled it's easy and tempting to not to say that.

John's been shown behind the scenes we saw last week that God is actually on the throne that if we look merely on earth and not in heaven as well we only get one side the story the ultimate reality is God is victorious you see it might look weak and helpless like a lamb but the lamb is the lion of Judah and he's triumphed and that's the reality that we are being encouraged to hold fast to to keep strong in you see appearances are deceptive appearances on earth are deceptive don't judge don't judge by appearances the appearances of our earth might say God's weak absent defeated not at all look up into heaven and see the real victory see the real ultimate and eternal victory of the lion who on earth might look like a lamb but he's actually the conqueror for the universe we're told this to encourage us to hold fast on earth but this lamb is not any lamb it's a lamb that is slain a lamb that bears the marks of death that's even weaker it's even more foolish in a way a lamb that was slain the one thing in heaven the one thing in eternity that will bear the marks of death is the lamb slain and suggests a sacrifice not that he's just died of old age but he's been deliberately killed and it's a sacrifice and we'll see in a few minutes later in this chapter that it's a sacrifice as a ransom for many people a deliberate death but the paradox is that this lamb who was slain is standing slain lambs don't stand

I think but this one does standing because he still lives oh yes he was slain he was dead but now he's alive and he's standing standing in victory standing in triumph standing in resurrection life with seven horns which lambs don't usually have again a symbol of strength and might symbols that come out again from the old testament and notice where he's standing he's standing between the throne and the living creatures he's not standing on the distant side of the glass sea he hasn't just crossed it and is looking to God beyond the 24 thrones he's gone between them and even but further than the four living creatures he is standing right next to the throne of God whose right hand is outstretched with the scroll to be opened he is worthy to come into the very presence of God and take the scroll he went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne when he had taken the scroll the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell before the lamb each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints the four living creatures and the 24 elders whose unceasing praise of God on the throne we saw last week now direct their praise and worship their falling down in homage and reverence to the lamb who was slain it's an astonishing thing for someone from a Jewish background as John was and many of his readers presumably were to envisage thinking of worship of an animal or a human was highly offensive and extraordinary we take it for granted in a sense the worship of Jesus as Christians but this is a big step for

Jewish people one that we see the disciples making in the gospels amongst others as well here is worship of Jesus Christ the lion lamb on an equal footing with God not bringing him down a level and putting God here and Jesus here as some of those heretics knocking at your door will try and convince you not at all the picture of worship here is of Jesus fully equal in worship and worth ship with God on the throne fully equal it's a good test of any heresy knocking on your door where do you put Jesus and if he's not at the top equal with God the father on the throne of heaven and the universe then they're talking heresy opening the scroll means that prayers are answered these elders and living creatures are holding now a harp and golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints remember the context of down on earth the people of

[22 : 30] God the saints on earth praying how long oh God this persecution this opposition how long till Jesus comes again how long till your purposes are fulfilled and now we find the holding of these prayers suggest that their prayers now are coming to the throne of God's grace why because of the lamb who was slain if he wasn't slain and if he didn't stand and if he wasn't triumphant then prayers are waste of time if Jesus is not at the right hand of God the father in heaven then all the prayers in the world fall on deaf ears but as this book of revelation keeps telling us in symbolic ways our prayers are heard and answered because and only because the lamb who was slain is standing at the right hand of God the father at his throne of grace these living creatures and twenty-four elders who sang the praise of God on the throne now sing a new song in verse 9 you are worthy oh it opens the same way as the first verse you are worthy our lord and god it said in verse 11 of chapter 4 and now it is you are worthy the lamb to take the scroll and to open its seals for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for god's saints from every tribe and language and people and nation now the lamb equally with god is worthy of worship and praise they praise him because of his powerful death it's not you are worthy because you taught wisely on earth you're not worthy because you did miracles you're not worthy because you are a peacemaker you're not worthy because you had a prophetic voice you are worthy because you were slain it's his death and

a death that ransoms many people for god that makes the lion lamb worthy of worship from every tribe language people and nation without distinction it's a powerful death isn't it not simply for jewish people but for people of every tribe language people group and nation english speakers chinese people malaysian people burmese people indian people south africans even and no doubt even new zealanders and presumably tasmanians any and every without distinction one of the things i love the most about holy trinity church is that we are the beginnings of the fulfillment of this in a way in this church there's at least 30 different nations from our members maybe people from all sorts of different places iraq and iran and most of the asian countries from europe and asia and north america and australia and so on and we're here together because the lion lamb's death purchased us for god ransomed us for god dealt with our sins that is bringing us forgiveness what a powerful and extraordinary death of that lion lamb no wonder he is worthy of our praise and not only that but his death fulfills then god's original purposes when god made humanity in the first page of the bible genesis 1 it was so that they would have dominion over the earth when god then chose out of a fallen world a special people israel to be his people they were to be a kingdom of priests to rule and have dominion on earth when god extended that special chosenness to the gentile people in the new testament he said exactly the same thing

in 1 peter 2 that they were to be a kingdom and priests on earth and we are because of the lamb being slain the lamb being slain enables god's purposes for humanity to be fulfilled you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our god and they will reign on earth what extraordinary thing when dominion is raging around the roman empire putting christians to death here is a firm promise that because the lion lamb is victorious and is in heaven at the right hand of god on earth god's people will reign what an encouragement for struggling christians what an encouragement and challenge to us if our love has grown tepid or lukewarm what an encouragement to us not to drift away from worshipping and following the lion lamb well this new song of heaven that is worship of the lamb being sung by the four living creatures and the 24 elders they now get joined by a myriad and in fact myriads and myriads of angels this is like music that gradually builds up a crescendo and so in verse 11 john looked and he heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders and they numbered myriads of myriads literally 10 thousands upon 10 thousands more than you can number and they sang with full voice imagine the noise worthy is the lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing back in chapter 4 god on the throne was worthy of receiving glory honour and power now the lamb who was slain is worthy of receiving not only glory honour and power but wealth wisdom might and blessing as well there is the fullness of worship surely of the lion lamb of heaven and there's more crescendo because now john hears in verse 13 every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all it is is in them singing there's nothing left you see this crescendo has built up to its fullest volume every single thing in the universe is praising the lion lamb who was slain to the one seated on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever and the four living creatures said amen so be it this is right this is true we agree amen the lamb is worthy of all praise and the elders fell down and worshipped all the academic theology in the world is worthless if it does not lead to jesus christ being praised all our religious duty and devotion is worthless if it does not lead us to the worship of jesus christ see all of history points here god's purpose for the universe is found here in the eternal praise by everything made of jesus christ the lion lamb and his worth is because of his death a death that ransoms people from every place for god all the purposes of god for the universe are fulfilled only through the death of the lion lamb a

decisive and eternal victory a victory worthy of endless praise because our world worships many things it worships money wealth pleasure fun families security jobs etc worships other idols and other gods none of them delivers the goods none of them is worthy of the praise like this and there are many who claim to worship the real god but they actually marginalize or sideline or demote jesus so that jesus may be regarded as a wise teacher or a good healer or a miracle worker a prophet or peacemaker but it's not enough it's not christian and it's not christian worship jesus is to be worshipped equally and fully with god the father on the throne he is the object of eternal praise perhaps one thing by god's grace i can claim over the last 13 and a half years is to have preached christ crucified and i'll do so for the next two weeks without any scarrick of apology for this chorus of heaven tells us that christ crucified the lamb who was slain is the most important thing that has ever happened and will ever happen in and for this universe and whatever the cost whatever the

opposition whatever temptations we find we must never lose grip on following and worshipping the lamb who was slain in two weeks time my ministry here ends let me urge you each one of you from the bottom of my heart to continue holding fast to jesus the lamb who was slain never deviate or turn away from a life lived for his praise these passages draw us yet again in a different way from so many other pages in the bible that direct us in the same direction to the worship of jesus hold fast to him forever to the one who overcomes i will give a place with me on my throne just as i myself conquered and sat down with my father on his throne amen and share so you you you