

To Be Worthy to Judge the World

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[0 : 00] Lord our God, we ask for your blessing now as we come to your word. May we relish in it, may we cherish it, and may our minds and hearts be expanded to grasp the greatness of your Son, the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Well friends, we continue our series today on why Jesus came to die. We're looking at this question from a different angle every week until Easter. Remember, two weeks ago we saw that Jesus came to die to be the expression of God's love through his atoning sacrifice for sin.

And last week we saw a very different reason he came to die. That was he came to redeem our bodies, to buy our physical bodies, to buy us, to own us so that we would live for him and glorify him in our bodies.

And today it's exciting because we've got a third and very different reason why Jesus came to die. The cross of Christ is magnificent in what it achieved, much more than we could ever imagine or think.

Today we want to think about what was in the cross for Jesus, what was in it for him. We like to say he died all for us. He did it all for you. Such was the love of God, it was all for you.

[1 : 19] But actually, the Bible says there was motivation for Jesus to die for himself. There were benefits for him to gain that bring him more glory.

And we want to encompass this in our understanding of the cross so that we actually have a big view of God. So we don't just have a God who is all for you and me, but actually a God who is the biblical God who works for his own glory and for his own honor.

If God is the most great and glorious being in the universe, for God to be focused on anything but himself would be ultimately a kind of idolatry.

But if God were to, in his wisdom, rescue us so that we could be focused on him, then that is God making much of himself and blessing us with the knowledge of himself because he is the most glorious being in the universe.

It's not all about us. It's all about God. And we're going to unpack this today by looking at this drama of Revelation 5.

[2 : 30] It's an amazing part of scripture. I agree with Graham that it's an amazing part of the book of Revelation and it's an amazing part of the Bible. It's a bit tricky, I think, to make us jump into a book like Revelation just out of the blue.

It's a difficult book. It's an apocalyptic book with much imagery and symbol. What we've missed so far in Revelation is that John has had a message from God for the churches of the early church in chapters 1 to 3.

Then the apostle is taken to the throne room of heaven where he witnesses around the throne of God are many heavenly beings, strange creatures, elders, living creatures, and they are worshipping God continually, praising him for being the creator of heaven and earth.

And so chapter 4, the previous chapter of Revelation, ends with this word of praise. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created.

God is praised for being the maker, creator, sustainer of all things. He is worshipped for that and we should worship him for that. Then John, as he's there in the throne room of God, he's dazing on the glory of God on the throne and he sees in the right hand of God a scroll.

[3 : 57] 5 verse 1, 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. This is a most important document that exists in heaven.

John cannot read the scroll but he can see from a distance that it has writing on both sides. It's a full document, it's a complete document, whatever it contains.

And it's in the form of a first century legal document, like a last will and testament. It is sealed with seven seals. In the ancient world, a wax stamp and seal represented someone's signature and someone's authority was put on a document if their seal was on it.

This document, this scroll, has seven seals, which in Revelation is the number for God, the number seven. It's the number of completeness and perfection. God himself has vested his authority, his seal on this book or this scroll.

It must be very important. We see, we know what's in the scroll because the rest of the book of Revelation is about the opening of the scroll. And basically the scroll contains the destiny of the world, God's purposes for the destiny of the world.

[5 : 22] The scroll contains God's cosmic judgments against the nations of the world. So it's a most important book. It contains his plan and purposes for the wrapping up of the world and the setting straight, the vindication of God's people and the justice of God enacted out on the wicked.

So it's an important scroll. And the way scrolls worked in the ancient world was, if someone dies and you have their will and you have it sealed, you had to find someone who was a worthy person to be the executor of that document.

And when you found such a person, as soon as they broke a seal, the document becomes legally binding. So to open the scroll is actually to enact its contents and to give them their power applies from as soon as you break the seal.

So you need a worthy person to break the seal of such a document. And so the story develops. John sees an angel.

I saw a mighty angel, verse 2, proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and break the seals? Who is worthy to enact God's cosmic judgments against the world and for the world, for his people?

[6 : 42] Who can act on God's behalf? Who has the holiness? Who has the power? Who is worthy to do that? John may have expected an angel to do that.

Often in the Bible there are angels who are God's agents of justice and judgment. But here we have a mighty angel, a strong angel, and he's saying none of us are worthy, none of the angels are worthy.

Who can do it? The angels don't have anyone who can do it. Biblically speaking, we might expect that God's people themselves were meant to play this role.

When God rescued Israel out of Egypt, he said to them, you will be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. That would be God's agents on the earth to bring God's rule to the earth.

But of course they failed to do that. Among God's kingdom, the kingdom of King David was meant to be kings who were kings after God's own heart to be agents of his judgment and mercy and his salvation.

[7 : 51] But again, those kings failed to do it. And so John tells us there was no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth who could open the scroll or look into it.

There was no one who can set things straight for God. There was no one who can act as God's agent to enact his promised judgments.

And so John says in verse 4, I began to weep bitterly. John is overcome. He is depressed.

He is stressed. He is just bitter that there is no one who can do this. You see, friends, John lives in an unjust world.

The first century world, like our world, was a world where pagan leaders exalt themselves like gods and punish the saints of God, where there are movements to stop Christians, where there are movements to persecute the church, to target Christians, to hurt them.

[9 : 01] That was John's world. And John has seen heaven. He's seen that heaven is excellent. Heaven is magnificent. But what can he take back to the suffering saints in the first century?

What message of hope can he give to the martyrs of the first century? Is God impotent to the forces of evil in our world?

It feels that way to John, and so he weeps. This scroll, this document is so important. It represents where heaven meets earth, where the purposes of God will be wound up, and God himself will vindicate his people and judge those who hate him.

Is there no one who can open this scroll? Is there no one worthy? John can see no one, and so he weeps for the glory of God. I don't think, friends, there's a lot of weeping today in the church for the vindication of the name of God.

There's not a lot of weeping for God's glory. We weep maybe as victims of the consequences of our own sin, or others' sin against us. We weep that we live in a sinful world, where one of the results of sin is that there is suffering.

[10:18] We weep when we are robbed of our comforts. But when do we weep for the glory of God? When do we weep for the knowledge of God to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea?

When do we weep for God to be vindicated? When do we weep for our brothers and sisters in Christ who bear physical scars for the name of Christ overseas, the persecuted church?

When do we weep for evil causes to be crushed by God and for evildoers to meet their just deserts in the judgment of God?

That is what John weeps for. And then something changes. One of the heavenly beings, one of the elders, speaks to John.

Verse 5, 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.

[11:23] There is one who can open the scroll. He is the promised lion of the tribe of Judah that Jacob predicted in his blessing of his 12 sons in Genesis 49.

He is the root of David, the one predicted in Isaiah 11 that we heard read. He would be the one who would rule the world. He would be the one who's the root of David.

He exists before David. But also in Isaiah 11, he's the shoot of David. He's a descendant of David.

That, of course, is the Messiah. That is Jesus, the one who is the eternal son of God and yet incarnate in the line of David, both root and shoot of David.

He is the Messiah lion who has conquered. He can open the scroll. He can break the seal and enact God's purposes. And so John is now looking.

Where is this lion? Where is this lion who has conquered? And he looks around and says, I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered.

[12:34] He's looking for a lion that's conquered. He sees a lamb slaughtered. That is a puzzle.

He's looking for this great victor and sees a bloody slaughtered lamb.

And yet the lamb lives. The lamb is glorious. He is strong. He has seven horns. The horn is the symbol of strength. He's completely strong. He has seven eyes.

This is a tricky bit in verse 6. Seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. I match that against the Holy Spirit.

It's a sevenfold spirit, the perfect spirit of God who is the strength of Jesus and the eyes of Jesus in the world. Jesus then does the most incredible thing.

The lamb does the most incredible thing. And if you've ever had people challenge you about, is Jesus God? Is it right to worship Jesus? Well, verse 7 is irrefutable proof that we should worship Jesus because the lamb went and steps up.

[13:46] He approaches God without trembling and takes the scroll out of the hand of God. He snatches the scroll of God's purposes and takes them for himself.

And when he had taken the scroll, he is worshipped. The living creatures, the four of them and the 24 elders, fell before, not before God, but before the lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints or the prayers of the church.

This is a stunning development that the lamb, that Jesus alone can take the scroll and enact the purposes of God. And when he takes it, he shows that he himself is one with God the Father.

He himself is part of God, Father, Son and Spirit. He himself is to be worshipped. And the elders around hold these bowls of incense, which is said, represent the prayers of the saints.

And you may have heard this. This comes up a few times in Revelation that the prayers of the saints rise up like incense to heaven. Your prayers are heard in heaven. I think it's worth saying, though, that I don't think it's talking about just any prayer.

[15:02] You know, we often, I think we often pray for our health and wealth, which I guess is okay, because God provides everything. But these are prayers that people have prayed for the vindication of God and the vindication of God's saints.

And we have an example of such a prayer later in the book. In chapter 6, we have the Christian martyrs praying, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?

It's a prayer for God to vindicate his people and avenge the blood of the martyrs, of Christians who have died for the name of Christ. If you've ever prayed, sick of the world and prayed for God, bring your judgment, Lord, or how long, O Lord, or your kingdom come.

They're the kind of prayers, I think, which are the prayers which are the incense in this chapter. If you've ever suffered and longed just to be with God forever where he wants you to be and prayed, how long, O Lord, then that prayer was answered when the Lamb snatched the scroll and began enacting the judgment of God.

It is happening as we speak. The risen Lamb of God, the ruling, ascended Lord Jesus, is beginning the judgment of God and it's going to culminate in the final day.

[16:27] But there's still some unanswered questions. In particular, how do we reconcile this Lion-Lamb thing? How do we have a... He's looking for a conquering lion and sees a slaughtered lamb.

How is it that one who is weak, a slaughtered lamb, could be the one who's going to execute the final judgments of God? How does power fit with suffering?

This is answered in the song, in this wonderful new song of verse 9 and 10. They sing a new song, You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.

For you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God, saints from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God and they will reign on the earth.

All the pieces of the puzzle come together in this song. All the tensions of the Bible, all the hopes of the Bible come together in this song. Jesus is worthy.

[17:31] Jesus is the glorious lion of God precisely because he was the lamb who was slain, because by his blood he purchased saints from every tribe and nation and language.

Because his cross was powerful and effective, because he achieved so much in the cross, he is now worthy to be the executor of the judgments of God.

This is a paradox, I think. It's a mystery of Christianity that through the suffering of the lamb we see the triumph and the victory of God.

Through the suffering of God's son, God's power is made known and the son is made worthy to be the judge of the world. Worship of Jesus is intended to be a universal religion.

He purchased people from every tribe and language and nation. The church may feel weak, the church may, you may think people will try and sell it to you that the church is shrinking, going nowhere, but we see in heaven there will be multitudes that will be bigger than we can imagine.

[18:47] The numbers in heaven will be amazing. And as John watches all this, he sees heaven expanding as he goes. Verse 11, I looked and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders.

And I would ask, well, how many? I like numbers. And he says, they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands. And myriad is just the Greek word for the biggest number they can think of and it's sort of like, it's not quite infinity, but it's hundreds of millions of heavenly beings worshipping, who were worshipping God on the throne, then now they are also worshipping the lamb.

They sing, worthy is the lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

These are exactly the same words used to praise God in the last chapter to praise him as creator. They said, you are worthy, you created all things to receive wealth and honour and praise and blessing and glory.

And now it's saying of Jesus because you died on the cross. You are worthy of glory and honour and wealth and wisdom and power. Jesus is renewing creation so he receives the praise that God received for being creator.

[20:14] and the worship expands even more. Verse 13, a third song, I heard every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth, in the sea, all that is in them, all creation singing to the one seated on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever.

And the four living creatures said Amen and the elders fell down and worshipped. From now on in the book of Revelation, whenever God is mentioned, he will be called to him on the throne and to the lamb.

Him on the throne to the lamb. To him on the throne and to the lamb. Jesus is there with God worshipped. The Trinity, God the Father and the Son and of course the Spirit is there, the sevenfold Spirit of God.

God is glorified forever. Jesus is remembered forever for his work on the cross. You will never ever forget the cross. He is marked off as God's lion lamb, the slaughtered one.

In heaven we will never tire of remembering our rescue, remembering the depths of sin which we were in and the rescue which he wrought for us through his death on the cross.

[21 : 35] Jesus is marked forever as worthy conqueror, slaughtered lamb, glorious saviour, blessed ruler, executor of the judgments of God.

All titles that he did not have before he died on the cross. So why did Jesus die? To win those titles. To win glory for himself.

To exalt himself across our universe. John now has a message he can take back to the suffering church and say the lamb who was slain is a conqueror and so stay true to the lamb and you too will conquer.

Jesus died to be made worthy to judge our world. Jesus is now because of his death the cosmic conqueror over sin.

he is the victor over the enemies of God. The last days have begun and through the preaching of the gospel through the preaching of the message of the crucified king we win souls for Christ we win households for Christ and we win nations for Christ.

[22 : 50] He is executing the judgment of God and those who reject that gospel make themselves his enemies and they are destined for destruction by his hand.

Friends this is a great angle to worship Jesus from. He died so that he could exalt himself as the glorious conquering saviour the slaughtered lamb.

Is Christianity about weakness or strength? Is it about being weak or strong? The beauty of the paradox of the gospel is that it's about conquering through the slaughter of the lamb.

It's actually about conquering through weakness. It is strength through weakness but always through weakness through the cross through us taking up our cross and following him.

Through us witnessing to the cross testifying to the power of the cross and being persecuted for it. How does your life feel?

[23 : 52] How does your Christian life feel? Does it feel strong or does your Christian life feel weak? My Christian life feels weak and that is how it is to be as we testify to the conquering lamb through our own weakness as we hold on to Christ through thick and thin through persecution through pain through death.

Jesus has conquered and sits at the right hand of God. If we stick with his people if we stick to him we will conquer as well and we will be a kingdom of priests to reign on the earth.

So friends never give up worshipping Jesus. Never give up and never forget the cross of Jesus is what marks him out as glorified conquering lion, the slaughtered lamb.

Why don't we praise and worship him now? Lord Jesus we exalt you and give you all glory. glory. We thank you for your death on the cross and we know that in heaven we will never forget it so we pray that we would live by the cross today.

Lord Jesus you are the lion of the tribe of Judah. You are the root of David. You are the slaughtered lamb. Break the seals Lord Jesus and execute the scroll.

[25 : 17] Reign as judge. Redeem your people. Claim your inheritance from every tribe and nation and tongue. Summon the heavenly choir, the myriads of angels and receive all blessing.

Receive all honour. Receive all glory. Receive all might for ever and ever. Amen.