

Revelation 5

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] 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 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 look into it. 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.

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

[1 : 17] A number of years ago, when our children were small, we attended their Christmas pantomime.

And the pantomime, I'm not quite sure what story exactly it was, but this particular scene always stayed with me. The scene was that there was a king and one of the pupils was playing the part of the king and he was sitting on his throne.

And then there was the prime minister or the mayor of the town, I think it was. This was played by another pupil. And at one point, there were about seven or eight fairies.

And the king stood up and he said, And one voice, of course, as they were meant to do, said, No!

And when they said no, all of the fairies fell down. Dead, supposedly. And the mayor then stood up and said to the audience, Now look what you've done.

[2 : 56] You've got rid of all our fairies. And he said to the audience, We do believe in fairies, don't we? And the audience said, Yes!

And they all stood up again. For many people, the existence of God depends on whether you believe or not.

For many people, religion, faith, or whatever you want to call it, is such a personal thing that it really fully depends on the individual.

If a person chooses to believe in God, then for that person, God exists, just like the fairies. But if you choose not to believe in God, then for you, God doesn't exist.

That's the way it is for a great number of people in the world. But I want to suggest to you today that that is totally illogical.

[4 : 01] And if that's what you believe, then please stop and think about how absurd that is. Because the existence of God doesn't depend on whether you believe in Him or not.

But if God exists, He exists. Whether you choose to believe He exists, whether you care to recognize that He exists, or whether you don't.

It's not a matter of whether you believe, it's a matter of He exists. And today, I believe in the existence of God because I truly believe that there is evidence in the world, in the universe, and in the Bible that stares at me in the face.

But sometimes that evidence, even for Christians, it is a trial to them. Sometimes what we expect God to do doesn't happen.

And at these times, the faith even of Christians can sometimes be shaken. Like for John. Many years before he wrote the book of Revelation, he had come to know Jesus as the Christ.

[5 : 30] He had come to meet with Jesus on the shores of the Lake of Galilee and day after day he had become more and more convinced and persuaded that Jesus truly was the Messiah, none other than God in the flesh.

Why? Because all the evidence was there. The healings, the teachings, the power, the authority. There was no question as far as he was concerned. But then, of course, you can imagine the perplexity of the disciples as Jesus was arrested and he was taken to the cross and nailed on the cross and when they saw him taking down his body and placing his body in the tomb.

You can imagine the questions that must have gone through the minds of the disciples who had come by then to believe that Jesus was truly God. How can God die?

How can his body be taken down from the cross and placed in a grave? This doesn't make sense. But then, of course, three days later when they met Jesus having been raised from the dead, then everything fell into place once again and they remembered that this was something he had always prophesied that he would be put to death and that on the third day he would rise again from the dead.

It all hung together. And for the rest of John's life he had preached the good news that Jesus was risen from the dead and that his death secured our forgiveness if we come and trust and surrender to him.

[7 : 03] He had spent his whole life pastoring congregations and going in and out of people's homes and through the streets and the towns and villages preaching Jesus just like the other disciples.

The other disciples had all died for their faith but now he was left on his own and once again the evidence was perplexing perplexing because if Jesus' kingdom was guaranteed and if Jesus is truly the son of God then why is he now left on his own separate from the people he knows and loves why are his brothers and sisters being persecuted and killed and why is all the appearance the opposite of what he expects.

He would expect that the gospel would be going from strength to strength and that God would be building up his kingdom and that the forces of darkness would be defeated and vanquished but that wasn't happening as far as he could see.

So here was another time in the lateness of his life in which his faith was stretched in which his faith was shaken.

There are times like that when we expect that God will act in a certain way in our lives and when he doesn't do it then we wonder why. This was John going through a period like this wondering what was going to become of the church that he had spent his life pastoring, caring for, teaching what was going to become of the great kingdom of God that Jesus had promised and that John had been so devoted to.

[8 : 41] Now he was on his own in a prison on an island in the Mediterranean and he was late in life not knowing what was to become of him and not knowing what was going to happen in the world and who was going to win whether the forces of the Roman Empire were going to finally eradicate the Christian church.

That was what was happening. It was then that the Lord came to John in this wonderful vision that we know as the book of Revelation and the purpose of it was to say that the evidence even although it was obscured as far as John was concerned that God was still at work and God would bring to pass his purpose.

And of course the book of Revelation is a complicated one we've looked into it in detail in the past. I want to return to this great chapter this chapter which was which I if you forgive me for sounding a little bit irreverent it's not supposed to be irreverent but if I was to give this chapter a title I would call it this a drama out of a crisis.

I don't mean that in any superficial way I mean that really it's a drama in that it's a revelation. God is doing something. He's doing something profound.

He's doing something solemn. Something that will stick in John's mind forever and ever and something that will confirm to him once and for all that John's work was not in vain in the Lord.

[10:16] It wasn't an empty service. John was going to see in these visions that he that God was going to fulfill and he was going to complete successfully complete his work on the earth.

I want us to look at this because here we have a vision of heaven. It's a symbolic vision. Don't think that because all of these things are described in chapter 4 where the vision of heaven is described in great detail for us.

Don't think that these are all literal items. For example, the trumpet and the jasper and the carnelian and the rainbow and the emerald and the 24th throne.

All of these are symbolic representations of some aspect of heaven that God wanted John to be aware of. Something that would give him encouragement and something that represented a profound truth.

But here in chapter 5, the focus is on a scroll. Remember that they didn't have books in those days like we have books here that are nicely bound and very cleverly put together with paper.

[11:36] They didn't have books as such. They had a scroll. If they wanted to read something it was like a piece of kitchen roll. If you've never seen a scroll because it was wound several times around a long piece of wood.

And there was writing on both sides. And this scroll was sealed with seven seals. It was closed. No one was able to see it.

And this was in the hand of the one who was seated on the throne. There can be no question as to who the one who was seated on the throne was.

This was God. Here was John. He's in the presence of God in heaven. God is surrounded by two sets of beings. He's surrounded by 24 elders and he's surrounded by four living creatures.

These are the beings that are included in this vision. Now the 24 elders I firmly believe represent the church, the people of God who God has redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

[12:45] They are human beings. They represent the worshipping, faith people of God, people who have come to know Jesus as their saviour. The four living creatures I believe are angels.

The angels who God created before he created human beings to worship him and to serve him and to do his will. We believe in angels because the Bible tells us that at many different points in the history of what God did on the earth angels appeared and they had particular tasks to undertake.

But they too are included in heaven and the worship that takes place in perfection in heaven. We don't often think of angels.

We're not to think of too much of them. Otherwise it becomes an obsession for us. We begin to look for them and we're not to look for them because we can't see them. But they're there.

Angels just the same way as we are. If we believe that we have been created by God in the image of God, then why don't we believe in angels? The same Bible tells me that I am created in the image of God.

[13:56] The same Bible tells me that angels have been created by God with a particular purpose. I don't want to get distracted but nevertheless they are included in the worship that takes place in heaven.

They are included in God's redemptive purpose and yet they didn't need to be saved. God did nothing to save them. They were perfectly in his presence and they always will be.

Well apart from those who are fallen, I'm not going to go into that. There's so many different digressions I could take but here are the angels of God, the four living creatures and they spend the whole of eternity worshipping God and they don't get bored for one moment.

Every moment is a new moment for them. They want to be there more than anything else gazing upon the glory and the awesomeness of God and so do the 24 elders and so does everyone who is in heaven.

There won't be a moment of tedium or boredom in heaven. Every moment in heaven will be new. Every moment will be as if it was our first moment in heaven.

[15:05] But the focus in this chapter is upon the scroll. The scroll. We're not told what was in the scroll and we're not told why this question was asked.

In verse 2 I saw a strong angel and this is the question that he had and the question was sent out into all the world in heaven and on earth and he's asking this all important fundamental foundational question and it's this who is worthy to open this the scroll and break its seals.

All eyes were upon it. John's eyes were on the scroll. He couldn't help but see the hand of God. and in the hand of God was his scroll holding it out for all eyes to see including John.

But we're not told what was in and the reason we're not told what was inside the scroll is because it's obvious from the question that was asked. Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?

We're to deduct from that question. We're to analyze that question. It's an obvious question. A couple of weeks ago when I was coming back from Korea I was on the plane from Doha to Edinburgh and somebody came on the tannoy, one of the staff came on the tannoy and said, is there anyone on this flight who is a doctor?

[16:52] Now, that's all she said. But right away, there's a whole heap of information in that question. She wouldn't be asking that question if somebody hadn't taken ill on the flight.

She wouldn't be asking the question unless she needed to, unless it was an important question, it was an announcement for everyone to hear. Is there anyone who is a doctor?

It told everyone that someone somewhere had taken ill. We didn't know how seriously, but it was serious enough to put out the request on the tannoy for someone to attend.

And I presume that someone did attend because everything else seemed to go very smoothly. There was no more word about it. You see, the question itself tells you how important a question.

The fact that God himself, the fact that this angel is asking heaven itself, this question means that it's important because if it wasn't important it would never be asked.

[17:58] And it's a question that affects the whole of the universe, particularly the human race. John himself, when no one was found, the answer to the question, in all of heaven, no one, no one was able to, was worthy to open the scroll and break its seals.

That's what verse 3 tells us. And when John realized that nobody was responding to the question, he began to weep. And when it tells you here in verse 4, I began to weep loudly, it means that he was utterly inconsolable, almost hysterical, with utter devastation, because nobody was found worthy, not even in heaven.

Surely, in all the perfection in heaven, God has always been perfect. Father, Son, and Spirit, the angels who were there in heaven with him, they were perfect, they were sinless, they had never fallen, they had never disobeyed or rebelled in any possible sense, and yet no one, not even God himself, not even the one who sat on the throne.

This is the perplexing thing, isn't it? This is the question that we're at, how in the world, how in heaven, was no one found worthy to open the scroll?

Wonder what that word worthy means then. It can't mean perfection, because God is perfect. It can't mean sinlessness, because God is sinless, and if the question meant who is good enough or sinless enough to open the scroll, then God could have done it.

[19:42] The one who sat on the throne, he could have opened it himself. So the word worthy obviously means something other than God's sinlessness. It must mean something other than moral perfection, because the angels are morally perfect, and if it meant moral perfection, then they could have opened the scroll.

Obviously the word means something different. The answer lies in what follows. You see, you have to read the whole, you stop there, and you don't get the story, you have to continue, and as you continue, all the pieces like a jigsaw are put together, because the answer to the question, what does worthy mean, lies in verse 5, 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.

See, what's happening is as you're going through the book, everything is unfolding, that's what the book of revelation means, it means that piece by piece, God is unfolding himself, he's revealing himself, and what he has done in the world, and what he continues to do in the world, and even in this chapter, there's an unfolding, there's a certain mystery, it's hidden at first, and as you read through the chapter, your understanding becomes clearer and clearer as the events unfold, as the drama unfolds.

John is absolutely devastated, why is he devastated? Because this scroll contains the plan of God for the universe, for the world, this scroll is about God's purpose, for the world, and if it's not opened, that was symbolic for it not being fulfilled.

If nobody can open it, if the seals cannot open, then it can't be done. It's going to be sealed up in the book forever and ever, which means that heaven will be the same, God will be the same, God will be just as glorious and just as majestic, just as holy as he ever was.

[22:00] What will be the difference is if the scroll is not opened, we will never be in heaven. John will never be in heaven. There will be no way heaven will not be opened.

If the scroll is closed, heaven is closed. And this world is consigned to destruction and annihilation and judgment, only judgment.

There is no good news. There is only lostness and emptiness and punishment for a world that has deliberately rejected God and rebelled against him.

There is no salvation if the scroll is not opened. And John knows that. He's aware of that because he knows the business in which he's involved.

He's been in the church now ever since he met with Jesus. He came to discover what Jesus came to do all those years ago when he watched him dying on the cross and rising again from the dead.

[23:00] When he watched people one by one coming to a saving relationship with Jesus. But then the answer, the glorious answer is this, that despite John's tears, the elders said to him, weep no more, don't cry anymore.

Look, look, look. Stop, stop. Look at what God has done. Here's the answer to the question. Verse 5, 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.

Here's the first announcement and the first announcement is he doesn't see first, he hears first. And the description is all too familiar to John because John knows his Old Testament.

And if you really want to grow in your knowledge of Jesus and the gospel, you have to get to know the old as well as the new. You can't just throw out the old.

If you want to get to know the book of Revelation, you absolutely have to know the Old Testament because Revelation is full of Old Testament imagery and symbolism that you get from especially Ezekiel.

[24:14] John knew all too well what the lion of the tribe of Judah was. It went all the way back to a prophecy that Jacob made, Israel made to his son Judah.

And when he said in verse 8 in Genesis 49, Judah, your brother shall praise you, your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. Judah is a lion's cub. From the prey, my son, you have gone up.

He stooped down, he crouched like a lion as a lioness. So Judah always had the symbolism of a lion, but so does Jesus. Jesus' title is the lion of the tribe of Judah because he has prevailed, he has risen victorious from the dead.

But it also tells us that he is the root of David, has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seal, the root of David. That will be familiar to those of you who have been following along with our series on the life of David and two or three weeks ago we looked at chapter seven in second Samuel where God promised to David that he would always have a son to sit on the throne.

Now the interesting thing here is is that this word root, the root of David, actually also means a shoot of David. I remember once coming across a tree that had fallen in the wind.

[25:43] The wind had got this tree, this tree had been there for decades and the wind had caught it and the tree had fallen and the workmen had come along and they had they had sawn off the bottom so that it was just a stump left.

But as the months went on a shoot appeared in the middle of the stump so that you could say that this is a tree that was but it was also a tree that will be again.

Here was a new life out of the old and that's exactly what happened in the old testament. You remember how God promised David that he would always have a son to reign on the throne of Israel.

Remember we said that at the time of Jehoiakim and Jehoiakim all of that came to an end when the people of Israel were taken into captivity. And when it appeared historically that God had abandoned that promise but he didn't.

That was the moment when if you like the tree fell. And yet there was a promise there was going to God still had a purpose for his people and the shoot appeared.

[26:54] Who was the shoot? Jesus Christ. He was born out of the line the lineage of David. The family of David. That's why so much effort goes into tracing his lineage in Matthew and Luke so that the Jewish people would be able to see how God unfolds his promise and he makes that promise secure in Jesus Christ.

Now if you were told behold the lion of the tribe of Judah somebody was to say to you look there's the lion and they pointed you in a certain direction and you looked in that direction you would expect to see a lion wouldn't you?

You would expect to see him in all his glory and in all his splendor. None of us denies the splendor of a lion. Of all the creatures in the world is there any creature that is so so king like that's why we call him the king of the beasts full of splendor and power and majesty.

It was always meant to be that way. The lion was always meant to symbolize that strength and that might. But when John looked he saw a lamb.

The lamb was standing but it wasn't just a lamb. It was a lamb that was standing as if it had been slain. A lamb is in many senses the opposite of a lion.

[28:33] The lion would pray, would feed on a lamb if he got the chance. We've all seen these programs where they film a lion hunting a prey and it appears that there's no creature in the world that is safe from a lion.

But certainly a lamb isn't. A lamb is a weak creature. A lamb is a being, an animal that is vulnerable and open to a lion's appetite.

So you've got the two ends of the spectrum haven't you? You've got the lamb and the lion and the lamb is the lion and the lion is the lamb. John is told behold the lion of the tribe of Judah and he looks and behold there's a lamb.

And once again John knows exactly what a lamb symbolized in the Bible. A lamb was in the Bible all through the Bible the way in which God removed the sin of his people through the sacrifice of the lamb.

And this is supremely seen in the Passover way back when the children of Israel came out of Egypt. And when their deliverance was by means of the lamb that was killed one for every family and it was put to death and it was roasted and it was eaten and the blood was taken and put on the doorposts so that when the angel of death saw the blood on the doorposts he passed over that house and that house was saved.

[30:07] And all through the Bible the lamb is symbolic of God removing our sin. Remember what John the Baptist said when he first saw Jesus he said behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

And so when Jesus appeared in heaven in front of John as the lamb and the lion then John knew what this represented. and when he took the scroll the lamb took the scroll because only he was worthy and that word worthy means qualified.

There was only one way in which only one way to qualify Jesus to open the scroll and you know what that was? It wasn't his perfection.

He was always perfect. God was always perfect. but what made Jesus worthy to open the scroll was this the fact that he had died on the cross and taken away the wrath of God that we deserved.

So that when he took the scroll the four living creatures the angels the twenty four elders they fell down before the lamb each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense and they sang a new song saying worthy are you to take the scroll to open its seals for you were slain.

[31:38] Look at what it says in that verse verse nine you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

When Jesus died on the cross that was the moment people were ransomed for God and I want us to leave it there.

I want us to leave that glorious thought in our minds that if you are a believer today you are a ransomed person. The price that needed to be paid for your salvation has been paid in full by Jesus.

That's what we mean by a ransom isn't it? they say that the 200 girls that were kidnapped in Nigeria we hope and we pray that they will be set free next week.

Maybe we're all wrong. Maybe it'll come to nothing. Who knows but we can only hope and pray that it's true. And that's because a deal has been struck between the Nigerian government and Boko Haram.

[32 : 57] Now I don't want to go into the politics of paying ransoms to terrorists and all the rest of it. I don't want to do it. But they say that a deal maybe means. But I can tell you this.

That if one of my children was kidnapped I would pay anything. you could tell me how wrong it might be to negotiate with terrorists and all the rest of it but I would say to you well it's not your child.

I'll pay anything. Why do we say that as parents? Because we love our children. There's nothing like a parent's love for their child.

There's no comparison. And it was because of God's extraordinary love for us that he paid the ransom price.

I'm not saying he paid anything to the devil. He destroyed the devil. But he had to pay the ransom price in order for our deliverance and for our freedom and for our salvation and for our forgiveness.

[34 : 16] And that ransom price was nothing less than his life on the cross and all the suffering that was involved in dying on the cross for you and for me.

The Lamb of God laid down his life. He paid the price for me to be set free and for me to be to belong to his kingdom and for me to belong to his family as you can belong to his family today.

Do you belong to the family of God? I hope you do. I so hope you do. I so hope you're part of this kingdom that he talks about in verse 10. We'll leave it there.

And he has made you a kingdom and priest to our God and you shall reign on the earth and be with God in heaven forever and ever. That's why we were created.

That's the fullness of our humanity. No one will ever discover why they have been created, why they're in this world until they come to know God and Jesus Christ.

[35 : 30] To know God is to have everything. To know Jesus Christ is to know liberty and forgiveness. That we can't find anywhere else.

And today as we reflect on these glorious words in which John has a glimpse of heaven itself, may that heaven come down to where we are and draw every one of us in once and for all.

Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for that this is what worship is all about, gazing upon what Jesus has done for us, reflecting on his love for lost sinners like ourselves, giving thanks for his inexpressible gift, his indescribable gift.

And Lord, we pray that as we are reminded that God's kingdom is being built and that we'll never ever fail, we ask that you will make us part of that kingdom and that your kingdom will come and that your will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Psalm number 34 to close with. And that's the thing, Psalm's version is from verse 7 to verse 11.

[36 : 49] Four stands on page 40. The tune is Jackson, the angel of the Lord surrounds and guards continually all those who fear and honour him. He sets his people free. Come, taste and see the Lord is good, who trusts in him is blessed.

Oh, fear the Lord, you saints with need, you will not be oppressed. Psalm 34 verse 7 to verse 11 and we'll stand to sing. Amen. The angel of the Lord servers and guards continually all those who fear and and and he sets his people free.

Come, taste and see the Lord is good, who trusts in him is blessed.

Oh, fear the Lord you you saints with me you will not be oppressed.

Young lions may grow weak and faint and hunger for their food, but those who wait upon the Lord held on the candy who come dear my children gather round and listen to my word and I will help you understand how you may fear the Lord.

[39 : 12] for that we are able to have a time of informal fellowship after the service today. We pray to be thankful for all the gifts that you give to us and for each element in the day that the Lord has made.

We give thanks for the Lord's day and we pray to enjoy the great benefit that is in resting and in worshipping. We pray that your blessing will be upon us now.

We pray that grace and mercy and peace from Father, Son, and Spirit may be ours in Christ. Amen.