

"The Lamb who was slain"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It is good to see you all here after our little snow hiccup last week.

I know for some of us who live in New Haven, we thought this isn't anything at all. But then I talked to someone from the outlying areas and they said, yeah, we probably wouldn't have come. So anyway, we are always glad to be able to gather together and thankful for the opportunities to do virtual worship when we are unable to.

So it is good to be back together again. You know, I found myself in these last couple of weeks having a bit of longing. My first longing is that the sun would shine more.

I don't know if you felt that way, but it's been a pretty dreary, pretty gray kind of winter. And I've been longing for summer and warmth and sunshine. There are lots of other longings that are part of our life as well.

In relationships, we long for love, for companionship, for belonging. In our societal and political life, we long for a better world, for more just and right society.

[1 : 14] In our life investments, in our careers, are the things we throw our lives into. We long for significance and meaning to feel like what we're doing matters. Even in our religious life, we long for a vision and experience of God to capture our souls.

Human beings live lives of longing, and it's something that God has put in us to point us to something. But if you're like me, maybe you have found that there are many longings of your heart that have not been fulfilled, that are not met in this life.

C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* famously writes that we have hunger not because we were meant to be full all the time, but because there is something called food.

That a longing points us to something that is there, that is right and good, that we ought to have, or that we were meant to or designed to have, but don't have.

So we struggle with longing because we don't have the things we long for. Sometimes, of course, our longings go astray. We long for the wrong things.

[2 : 35] Jeremiah rebukes the nation of Israel in Jeremiah 2 for leaving the fountain of living water and building for themselves cisterns, cisterns that cannot hold.

And how often do we do that in our longings? We long for things of this world to give us more than they're capable of doing. Isaiah talks about the muteness and inability of idols, the things that we bowed down before, and yet they're not able to give us what we actually want.

You can fill in the blank. We'll explore that a little more later. Or maybe what are those things that we long for in this life that maybe we are asking more of than possible for them to give us?

And some of us, of course, have lived life long enough or short enough to be disappointed enough that we give up. We think longing is too hard. It hurts.

It's disappointing. I don't want to live like that anymore. So we kill our soul, and we kill our sense of longing. We decide to live as cynics or living in despair or living for the pleasure of the day with nothing better than that.

[3 : 52] But what if, what if there were something that could meet us, that could be the fulfillment of the things that our soul most longs for, something beyond ourselves?

This brings us to our passage this morning. If you're new here, we've been preaching through the book of Revelation. In the fall, we did the first couple of chapters, and we've just picked up last week, and we're going to continue through, through the winter and into the spring, to preach through the rest of the book.

And so we are in this morning, Revelation chapter 5. I forgot to find the page number for you, but here's the thing. Revelation is the last book in the Bible.

Go to the back and then flip forward a couple of pages. It'll be easy to find. Revelation chapter 5 is where we're going to be this morning. And as you look there, just a reminder, if you're new or if you've forgotten because you've been away over break, Revelation is a vision.

It's a vision that has apocalyptic imagery to communicate truth in a different way about God's work and His plan in the world, right?

[4 : 58] If you want to learn more about that, if you haven't, if you weren't here attending online last week, go back and listen to the sermon last week because I spent a lot of time just preparing us for thinking through this next section, both in terms of the structure of the book, but also the way that the book communicates through imagery.

So I'm just going to say that and then keep going. But remind you, chapter 4 and 5 are kind of a package deal. Chapter 4 is a vision of the throne room of God in heaven and where we see through imagery His greatness, His power, His authority, and His majesty.

It's adorned with precious metals surrounded by worshiping servants and filled with a song of praise to God because He is the greatest thing in all the world.

But we need to recognize that because 4 and 5 go together, chapter 4 is actually just setting. It's just the setup because in chapter 5 is the action of this section of the book of Revelation or this vision that's going on.

So with that introduction, let's look at and read Revelation chapter 5 together. chapter 5.

[6 : 41] 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 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. 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.

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. And 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.

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.

[8 : 52] And the four living creatures said, amen. And the elders fell down and worshiped. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we ask this morning for your help as we look into this vision, Lord, that is glorious and beyond, Lord, our ability to wrap our minds around.

Lord, I pray for your help, that by your spirit we might see a little more clearly and apprehend a little more deeply and understand a little more fully.

Lord, how worthy you are of our worship. I pray you would be my help this morning, that I might speak your word as I ought. And I pray for our hearts, all of us, that we would sit under your word this morning.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So if chapter 4 was the setting, chapter 5 has a narrative to it.

There's a problem, there's a solution, and there's a response. So this is what we're going to look through. In the courtroom of heaven, it's kind of amazing that there is a problem there at all, and yet there it is.

[10 : 06] The problem is this question that comes in verse 2, right? God is seated on the throne. He has a scroll in his hand.

And one of the questions that comes up immediately is, what is the scroll? What does it symbolize? What is it for? And there's lots of speculation in the commentaries about, was it a scroll?

Was it a book? How were the seals arranged? There are lots of contemporary potential parallels about how scrolls, there was actually a kind of scroll that you could open one part at a time.

So there's lots of interesting contemporary ideas about what the scroll might have meant. But what it comes clear through this is that the scroll, in its fundamental act, what it means is it depicts or tells of God's ultimate plan for his creation.

And it doesn't just describe it, but by reading it, it would be the enactment of it. So the question that's coming up is, who is worthy?

[11:11] Who is worthy to carry out God's plan of victory and vindication in the world? God has said, he has promised, he will overcome all evil.

He will come and make the world right and new. And that will come through the enemies of God's kingdom being cast down, judged and destroyed. God's people will be delivered and renewed and exalted.

But there's a problem in the throne room of heaven. Who is worthy to open the scroll? Imagine this. And he says, I looked around and in all of creation, right? That's in heaven and on earth and under the earth. That's shorthand. For in all of creation, I looked and there was no one.

No one who could do this. No one who was worthy to bring about God's promises in all of creation. What a great crisis this is in the story.

[12:22] And if we don't feel this, the rest of it's going to feel very rote and kind of like, oh, yeah, this is like what we do in church. We talk about these things. But I want you to feel the tension and the passion, right?

Because remember, this vision was given to the church in the first century that was suffering persecution, wondering, will God's plans prevail? Or will the church be eradicated by persecution and by hardship?

Will it be destroyed by false teachers? Will it be seduced away from faithfulness and become nothing? And in that context, if there was no one who could actually bring about what God's plan was for the world, then friends, we live a very, very despairing world.

And we might as well become like the cynic and the despairing person who lives for pleasure today and death tomorrow because it's all going to be terrible anyways. The longing is so palpable that John, in his vision, when he saw this, he wept loudly.

The word there is not like he had a tear running down his face. He was overcome with grief because of this. This is a great problem presented in this text.

[13:45] Now, friends, before we move on to the solution, I want to stop and think a little bit about whether this is a question that we ask today.

Is there anyone worthy to accomplish God's purposes in the world? I don't actually think it's a question we ask a lot for a number of reasons. One is because I think having lost a high view of God and broadly in society and in our world, we have developed, particularly in the last couple of hundred years in the West, a very strong sense that humans can do it ourselves.

We can do this. The power of the human spirit can overcome every adversity. The progress of humanity will eradicate racism, will eradicate cancer, will eradicate all the evils of our world.

And it'll be a better place. We just need to keep working towards it. We'll get there. The grit and determination of the human soul will finally make it all right. And we will bring about the world that we think God wants us to have here.

I think this is part of why this passage doesn't grip us because we're not even looking for that because we already know the answer. We can do this ourselves. We don't need anyone else.

[14:57] Now, not all of us are that way. Some of us know. Oh, no. We can't do it. But we're desperately looking in other places for someone to be worthy to enact God's purposes.

And though we don't think about this globally, we think about it in our own lives this way. If only I had that relationship that I long for, that's going to finally bring about God's goodness and purpose and fulfillment in my life.

If only I could, if only that mentor would give me that imprimatur of his approval, then finally my career would take off. And I would be, I would see God's plan fulfilled in my life.

If only that pastor would lead me and teach me well enough. He can be the one who will lead me to greatness or to fulfilled spiritual lives.

I'm going to take a little bit of an excursus here because I want to unpack one part, one application of this because the Iowa caucus is this week.

[16:02] And we live in a world today where one of my greatest fears is that we've started to ask political leaders to be the one who is worthy of bringing about God's ends in our world.

Right? That we're looking for politics to make the world right. And I'm not saying this from any partisan position. Right? But if we are thinking, if only we had the right person in the White House in America, the world will be made right and it'll be a better place.

Then what? Is God's kingdom going to come because of who sits in the White House? No. Joe Biden will not bring God's kingdom to America or to the world.

Donald Trump will not do it. Nikki Haley or whoever else may end up on a ballot. None of them are worthy to take this place in our hopes and in our longings, let alone our faith and our worship.

And look, friends, I'm not saying that we shouldn't be involved in politics. We should be. We have every right and we should engage well. Engage well in the processes that we are able to be engaged in.

[17 : 16] Promote your favorite candidate. Argue for what you think will be a good path forward. But recognize, friends, that we can't confuse politics with the kingdom of God.

And what we do as we go forward from here in this next year is we need to exhibit the character of Christ as we engage in a political process. And we need to make sure that as we look around one another, we see one another first and foremost as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Regardless of whether you disagree on the political application of biblical principles. Because no one is worthy in heaven and on earth or under the earth.

But, friends, as we know, as we've kept reading, because we know that the Bible would not leave us here in despair, there is hope.

Right? Because not from the heavens or the earth or under the earth, but as we see in verse 4, there is a solution to this problem. Look with me again.

[18 : 35] Verse 4. Nope, verse 5. Let's go to verse 5. And the elder 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 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. Friends, if the problem is great, the solution is even greater in the Bible.

The elders, probably angelic beings of some sort. Again, you learn about them in the last chapter. Go back and listen to the sermon from last week. One of them speaks in his vision to John, and he says, look, look.

[19 : 42] Though it feels like there's no one worthy, there is one. And this one comes from the throne. He doesn't come from heaven and earth and under the earth. He comes from the throne himself.

And he is this then cascading label, a series of labels or titles that we need to understand. And do not weep, because here is one who is able to take the scroll.

And as we've seen, John is filling his descriptions in the book of Revelation with Old Testament references. So we're going to spend a little time talking about these Old Testament images so that you can get the richness of what John would have understood.

Right? Because the first thing he says is, look, here is one who is the lion of Judah. Judah. This is in fulfillment of what God said through the patriarch Jacob to his son Judah in Genesis chapter 49 verses 9 and 10.

Josh is going to help me put some up on the screen. We're going to read some of these just so you can see these pictures. Right? Genesis 49 verses 9 and 10.

[20 : 49] This is the blessing on Judah. He says, Judah is a lion's cub. And from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down. He crouched as a lion. And as a lion is, who dares rouse him?

The scepter, that is the kingship, shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him.

And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. And what we see throughout, then, the Bible is that this lion of Judah leads you to David, the king exemplar in the Old Testament.

And yet even he is not worthy to take the role. And so the genealogy continues. And if you look at the beginning of the Gospels, you see through David comes Jesus. Of the tribe of Judah.

Of the line of Jesse. And this is what the root of David is referring to. This is from Isaiah chapter 11, where you see Isaiah talking about this hope for one who will come and bring righteous judgment on the earth.

[21 : 58] In a time when there was much upheaval, it says, There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, Jesse being David's father.

And a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and might, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord. And it goes on to describe this ruler who will come from David's family, who will fulfill these longings for a king who we can actually serve and worship.

And he is the conquering one. Jesus who died and yet rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty.

And the elder says to John, look, there is one who is worthy. And then he goes on and he says, for he was slain.

[22 : 59] Let's go back to Revelation. Look at it again. This is what we see, of course, in verses 6 and 7.

And then, as John looks to this one before the throne and the four living creatures and among them, there's a lamb. Wait, wait, wait. The lion just became a lamb.

Okay, so he wasn't transformed. He's both of these things. He's both the exalted king from the line of David who is right to reign, but he is also a lamb standing as if it were slain.

And so his authority and power comes through this purpose. We see this repeated throughout this. Because you were worthy, because you were slain.

You were a lamb slain. And friends, we need to, again, pull on some Old Testament imagery to understand the significance of what this is. Right? Because in Genesis 22, as Abraham, in obedience to God, took his son up Mount Moriah to sacrifice him, they got to the top of the mountain, and there was the wood, and there was the oil.

[24 : 19] But where was the sacrifice? And what God had told Abraham was, you need to give up your own son. And Abraham said, well, verse 13, Abraham lifted his eyes and looked and be, oh, well, what verses are we looking at here?

Seven and eight. Okay, let me read the right ones. Okay, so they're going up the mountain. And Isaac said to his father, Abraham, my father. And he said, here I am, my son. And he said, behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

And Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. And they went up together.

And at the very last moment, God provides a ram in the thicket as a substitute so that Isaac wouldn't be sacrificed, but that instead this lamb would be sacrificed.

This is then picked up in Exodus chapter 12, right? In the great story of the Passover, God's people in slavery to Egypt. And in the tenth plague, God comes to his people the night before and he says, this is how you will survive my judgment.

[25 : 33] By sacrificing a lamb and taking the blood of that lamb and covering the doorposts of your house. So in Exodus 12, verses 21 through 23.

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin.

None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians and when he sees the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your house to strike you.

A lamb slain for the protection of his people. We see it in Leviticus 4 as a sin offering for forgiveness for the people.

We see it as we move ahead to the New Testament. When John the Baptist first sees Jesus coming over, do you remember what he says? Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[26 : 58] And friends, this precious image may be fulfilled in the passage that Laura read earlier more than anything else.

That Jesus was like a lamb led to the slaughter. She read the whole passage. I'll just remind us again of verses 7.

Let me look. What did we put up there? Yeah, okay. We'll figure. So, he was pierced for our transgressions. Verse 5 and following.

He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. With his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted. Yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that has led to the slaughter.

[28 : 04] And like a sheep before it shears is silent. So, he opened not his mouth. And as we read this whole passage, did you hear what it was about?

It was because Jesus bore our sins. Because he died in our place. Because he was willing not to come with the prerogatives of kingship that he does have.

But he took those prerogatives and he laid them down in sacrifice for us. For our redemption. He bore our punishment for our sin. So that we might not be punished but be forgiven.

So that we might not die but that we might live. This is what the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world does for us. And this is why he is worthy.

The Lion who is the Lamb lays down his life for us. He doesn't come in power the way the world comes in power.

[29 : 07] To dominate and to dictate and to control. But he comes and he lays down his life in love for us. His power comes through his death.

He paid the greatest cost for us and for our redemption. He purchased us from the slavery to sin and death. And he brought us to himself.

Brought us into himself. So that we might have forgiveness in life. Can you imagine what it would be like for a first century Christian?

Who's seen the persecution of Nero and Domitian. Where they slaughtered Christians. Where they burned them as torches at his parties.

Where they were thrown into the Colosseum. To be torn apart by wild animals. To see Jesus.

[30 : 08] Standing in the throne room of God. Taking the scroll. Because he was slain. He is worthy to carry out God's purposes.

God's judgment will come. And it will be fierce. And it will be frightening. And we'll explore that in the coming pages. But the only one who is worthy of doing that. Is one who has laid down his life for us. This is the pattern. Of the gospel. This is why Jesus alone is worthy. Because he alone laid down his life.

For us. When he didn't have to. And friends. Let us walk. In a similar way. As we think about one application from this.

We see Jesus is worthy. And we'll talk about the response in just a minute. But friends. Let us recognize that even now. We walk in his footsteps. If we are following Jesus.

[31 : 08] We are not following him. On a path of worldly triumph and success. Where our enemies are defeated in this age. Oh we may see those things.

God may graciously do that in some places. And in some times. But what God has promised. Is that he will preserve his people. Through the trials and tribulations of this age. Redeeming more and more of us.

So that in the end. We might stand with him in victory. But for now. It may involve various kinds of suffering. Trials.

Persecution. For us. It is a call to love others. With sacrificial love. Not thinking of ourselves.

But of others. First. Walking in humility. Not in arrogance. Or in pride. God. If we look at the one who is worthy.

[32 : 08] How could we ever be like that? May God have mercy on us. And help us. Because instead of that.

We want to do. What we see in the throne room of God. The response in verses 8 through 14. It's this cascade. This cascade of worship.

This cascade of songs. And of declarations. Of the worthiness and the greatness. Of this lamb.

Who is a lion. Who is standing as one slain.

You see the cascade. It's echoing out. It's reverberating out from the throne. First you have the four creatures. And then you have the 24 elders. And they respond first.

And they say. Worthy are you to take the scrolls. 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 tongue. [33 : 06] And you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God. And they shall reign on the earth. And then it reverberated out from there. He looked around. And outside of that.

There were angels. And myriads and myriads. And thousands of thousands. Which seems to pick up language from Daniel chapter 7. And I didn't even get there.

Because the references are cool. But really scattered. But go and read Daniel 7 this week. And then read Revelation 5. To see there's a lot of connection there too.

But there's this myriads and myriads. And thousands and thousands of heavenly beings. Around Jesus. And they're responding to him as well. And they too say worthy is a lamb who was slain. Worthy are you because you have died. And they give him a sevenfold blessing. You are worthy to receive power and wealth. And wisdom and might. And honor and glory and blessing.

[34 : 04] And we know from the first century. That seven is a picture of completeness. He's saying you are worthy of everything. Whatever we could imagine to give to another person.

A recognition of their greatness. Of their glory. Of their honor. Of their goodness. Of our submission. And our worship. And our exalting of who they are.

Jesus is worthy of all of those things. And then verse 13 says. And then I heard. I heard from beyond what he could see.

From the heavens and the earth and under the earth. Every created being. To him who sits on the throne. And to the lamb.

Be blessing. And honor. And glory. And power. Forever and ever. Friends. This is what God is doing.

[35 : 08] In the world. He has one. Who is worthy. To carry out his purposes. And he is carrying out those purposes. Even now. He is building his church.

So that we might be a kingdom. And priest to our God. So that we might submit to him. Honor him as our ruler. Obey him. And then as priests.

Both honor and worship him. But also make him known in this world. And as we make him known in this world. We know that this is going to expand more and more.

So that every creature. From every tribe and tongue and nation. From every race. From every ethnic group. Friends. Martin Luther King had a great vision for our country.

And may it be increasingly so. But we know this is where it's going to finally be fulfilled. In the throne room of heaven. Where we will actually see people.

[36 : 04] From every tribe and tongue and nation. On their faces before God. Worshipping the lamb. Who was slain for our redemption. We see this as a great call then.

For what God is doing today. And we know that this is not done. We know that this is an ongoing work. We know that in the book of Revelation. It's meant to bring us comfort now. That this is coming.

And one day it will be. For sure. For sure. For sure. Because the one who was slain has risen again. And he stands at the right hand of the Father.

And he's able to take the scroll. And so as 1 Peter 2 tells us as a church. You are a chosen race. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people for his own possession. That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness. Into his marvelous might.

[37 : 10] Marvelous light. Once you were not a people. But now you are a people. Once you would not receive mercy. But now you have received mercy. Through the Lamb who is worthy of our worship.

And friends just to bring us to close. Is this not what we long for? At the core of our heart. Beyond anything else.

As we live in a world that feels old and tired and broken. And certainly the older I get the more it feels that way. When we are worn out by our own sin.

By the darkness that we feel both in us and around us. When we're longing for. Friends this is it. Lift up our hearts. Lift up our eyes to see Jesus who is worthy. He is worthy of our worship. He is worthy. He is worthy. To be the fulfillment of all of our longings.

[38 : 17] Let this vision of Jesus fill our hearts with a new song. The new song that was sung in this vision. A new song that we are able to sing even now.

Okay. This is a cool application. Have you ever thought about why God created music? He created music so that we can sing. In worship to Jesus. There may be other reasons that are. Music is really cool.

But have you ever thought about how central this is? That God gave us music. Christians sing far more than most of the people in the world. That's an aside.

Let's bring it back to the end. The vision. Because we know that this one who is worthy. Will one day bring about the new creation. And the new heavens. And the new earth. That our hearts long for.

And as we will see in Revelation 21. The new heavens and the new earth will descend. And a voice will say. Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them.

[39 : 16] And they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning.

Nor crying. Nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away. And he who is seated on the throne said. Behold I am making all things new.

Let this one who will bring all those new things. Who is bringing all those new things. In breaking now. With the fullness in the future. Let him fill our hearts.

And our mouths. With a new song of praise to him. Let's pray. Oh Lord Jesus. We thank you for. This.

Great vision. Lord I pray this morning. That it would be a balm to our soul. Lord that it would be water on parched ground. To remind us.

[40 : 15] That above all things. Lord may we. Lord continue. To know you more. So that we might worship you.

Lord help our hearts. Not to become cold. Or distracted. Or led astray. But Lord may our hearts be. Filled. And renewed.

Daily. As we see you. The exalted. Lion who is the lamb. Who is worthy. We pray this in Jesus name.

Amen.