

*All Things New: Is He Worthy?*  
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*Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 26:57-64; Revelation 5*

Our final Scripture reading for today is Revelation 5. May God add His blessing to the reading of His perfect, holy, and trustworthy Word. "Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they said: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped."

It's awards season. The Golden Globes, the Grammys, the Oscars...everybody's out to celebrate how wonderful the film and music industries are. Now an award doesn't mean a film or song is really the best one released in the year, but that's beside the point. But something happened at the Golden Globes last week that caused a stir. I never thought I'd talk about the host, Ricky Gervais, in a sermon. He's a devoted atheist, often crude, not someone I'd quote on a Sunday morning. But at the Golden Globes, he told the crowd, "If you win, don't use it as a platform to make a political speech...you are in no position to lecture the public about anything. You know nothing about the real world." It was savage. But ultimately, he was saying that they were not worthy of a global platform merely for delivering lines and being good looking.

That speech upset a lot of people in the room. But he made a good point: who has the right to tell us what to do and who we are supposed to be? Who has the authority to say, "This is how the world should work?" Ultimately, who is worthy? Is it you? Is it me? Our society says that everything is relative, there is no ultimate truth, so what you think is no basis for rules. From global warming to what we should teach in the schools, it all becomes based not on what is true but who is in power, since no one knows the absolute truth. No one is worthy enough.

This passage, though, gives us an answer to that question. It is one of the most poignant passages in Scripture. It reflects on the nature of who Jesus is. It reflects what proper worship of Jesus looks like. It tells us about who we're meant to be. Revelation 5 is the gospel in a nutshell. If you want to tell someone what we believe and why we worship the way we do, most of it is contained in Revelation 5.

When we were last in the book of Revelation, John was brought up into heaven to catch a glimpse of the throne room of God. We got a taste of the majesty and glory and might of God. We saw the living creatures who worship God day and night, and we saw 24 elders – likely representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples of Christ – who threw their crowns before the throne in honor and admiration of God. We got a peek into heaven.

We start today's passage still in the throne room. God has in His hands a scroll. It is written on both sides. Scrolls were made of animal skin, so you only wrote on one side; the other side didn't hold the ink well. This scroll is full to the brim! This is God's plan for the ages, His design for saving His people and receiving the glory due Him as our King and creator.

And it's sealed with seven seals. We've talked before how the number seven is a number of perfection, so the seven seals tell us this is a perfect document only to be opened by the perfect person. In the ancient world, seals represented authenticity and authority. A letter sealed by Caesar could only be opened by certain people under penalty of death. Remember how the tomb of Jesus was sealed with Pilate's seal to make certain no one would enter. This scroll of God's plan is so important that only the right person can unseal it and reveal what is inside.

The angel asks, "Who is worthy?" And no one could open the scroll. No one is worthy. And John weeps bitterly. He is beside himself at the great tragedy of the human race. The first Adam, in his sin, led all of humanity into sin with him. We're all contaminated, all condemned, because we do precisely what he did. And there's not one person, alive or dead, who hasn't fallen into that trap. The story appears to be done. The scroll left unopened. The great plan of redemption unread. The story of final judgment and eternal life cut down in its tracks. No wonder John is undone with grief. He knows this is it!

But then one of the elders comforts John. "Don't cry, look! The Lion of Judah, the root of David, the Messiah, He has triumphed! He is worthy! He can open what no one else can open!" The solution to the ultimate problem has been found. Then John does look, and he sees something completely unexpected.

Instead of a lion, he sees a lamb that has been slain, yet it is alive. The lamb is on the throne of God, in the center of it, surrounded by the four living creatures and the elders. The elders and creatures that worship God now surround the Lamb to worship. This Lamb is not just at the right hand of God but sits on God's very throne. While the Father and the Son are unique and separate persons, they are one God, and this is an illustration of that truth.

The picture of Jesus the lamb still has some elements that initially seem frightening: “He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” We just have to remember that what is important is the *seven* horns and *seven* eyes. In everything Jesus is, He is perfect. The horns and eyes represent that through the Spirit, Jesus watches over all His Kingdom perfectly. There is nothing outside of His view, nothing He is missing. We can be assured that we are always in His hands.

Jesus takes the scroll from the Father; He is the only One who can. As He does, the living creature and the elders worship Him, confirming that He is divine. Incense is rising, which was a common part of ancient worship, but here, the incense is made up of our prayers. When you pray, you a part of the worship scene in Revelation 5! Your prayers make up a sweet aroma before the Lord. He not only hears and receives our prayers, He is pleased by them.

Then the creatures and the elders sing. Look at the words. They are the summary of the gospel – Jesus is worthy because He was slain for His people, and through that sacrifice He purchased God’s people from every corner of the earth. These people are to be a kingdom and priests who reign on the earth. The language used for the nation of Israel now describes all the people of God, the true children of Abraham, the ones who through Jesus’ blood are considered to be of His fold, the second Adam, rather than belonging to the first Adam who sinned.

Then John has a vision of angels. The number is beyond comprehension – in the Greek, millions upon millions multiplied by thousands upon thousands. As we learned a couple of weeks ago, they don’t sing – they shout: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” The angels give us the proper response to the news we’ve heard. Because of what Christ has accomplished, every being everywhere should sing out God’s praise. And then in the final moments of this passage, that’s exactly what they do in worship.

I can’t tell you how much I love this passage. And it’s because it is a summary of the whole story, the whole Bible, in a single passage. I promise you, if you really get this passage deep down in your bones, you’ll have the gospel with you all the time and what it means for us and our proper response to it. I really believe that.

The first thing about this passage I love is that *it teaches us our pattern of worship*. Sometimes, you might wonder, why do we worship the way that we do? I’ve been in a bunch of modern churches where there’s a prayer, some songs, somebody speaking, and it’s all done. I’ve been in those churches; back in the day, I helped lead some of that. But the biblical pattern we have is illustrated in this passage.

The first thing is, participation. Participation by God’s children is essential to worship. The entire contingent is worshipping – the living creatures, the angels, the elders. There is no worship leader. They’re all doing it together. You may not love that we have prayers we say together or the creeds or the songs, but they are the way we participate in worship. Worship was never meant to be watched from a distance. Worship is meant to engage us and involve us.

So what's the pattern of worship? The ebb and flow of our worship is described in the scene in Revelation 5. It starts with sorrow, with grief, with the realization that no one is worthy; no one has the power to open the scrolls. Our guilt before God in that moment is consuming. We confess our sins as our act of contrition, our act of apology and regret, for living in a way unworthy. John's extreme mournfulness echoes our sorrow at our separation from God.

But just as we do that, we hear the word from the elder – don't cry. As soon as we confess, we have assurance of pardon. We have word that we are forgiven. That assurance is not based in our goodness or what we can do but what the Lion of Judah has already done. Our assurance is that payment has already been made; our debt is cancelled, paid in full.

That leads us into song, as it did the elders. When we look closely at the words, we recognize they are all about the salvation story. When you look at the lyrics, there is no "I." There is no "we." Everything is focused on Jesus and the Father. Everything emphasizes what Jesus did that was worthy and all the honor, glory, and praise due to Him for His accomplishment. Now many songs in the Bible include us; they come from our point of view. There's nothing inherently wrong about a song that includes "I" or "we." But in worship, we want our songs to first and foremost reflect the biblical story of salvation and the worth of our God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What about the sermon? We read Scripture and hear it explained because the scroll is in Jesus' hands. The Scriptures inform us of God's mighty plan and its' outworking. We metaphorically study the scroll of salvation every week with each passage of Scripture we study. Now the scroll Jesus will open also includes the coming woes and judgments we'll see in the rest of the book. But here, following the pattern, we sing God's praise and we listen to His words.

Once we have heard the word of God, we respond in faith, with what we believe. We respond to God's grace that we have learned about, saying "I believe." We continue to worship and sing and give because the worship service in heaven doesn't end. That should be true for us too. We will eventually get to our final hymn of the day and leave this place, but it should just be the beginning of our worship for the week.

If we leave out bits – if we leave out our participation, our confession and assurance, our reciting the creeds together responding in faith, our music praising God – we leave out integral parts of the story. We need the whole story. We sing it and it's true: we were made to worship. And we were made to worship in a specific way. Not necessarily with old hymns or new hymns, with "thee" and "thou"s in our Bible, but in a way that repeats the story we need to hear.

Another reason I love this passage: *it's all about Jesus*. It's so easy for us to get this wrong, to think that the Bible is a self-help manual, that the Bible is all about principles for life. There are principles for life in there, important moral standards, things that will help us live well, but they only actually work if we realize all of it is ultimately about Jesus. The Bible is not primarily about what we should do; it is about what God has already done.

Revelation 5 makes sure we are pointed clearly in the right direction. All the worship, glory, honor, praise, power, all is directed at Jesus. But look at this: Jesus did not come to purchase us with His blood so we would have good lives, because a lot of people lived harder, shorter lives because of their faith. He didn't even purchase us for us to live good lives or to become moral people; those are side effects of the purpose, but they aren't the purpose.

I like to think about it this way – you buy detergent to make your clothes clean, and after you wash them, they smell good. The smell is nice, but if the clothes smell like daisies but look like mud, the detergent didn't do its job. Jesus came to make us a kingdom and priests who both serve God and reign over the earth. Us becoming moral, upstanding people of integrity is huge, important, needed – but that's not the core of Jesus coming. He came to save us, to redeem us, to purchase us, to make us a kingdom and priests.

There are moral people who don't believe in Christ, but morality doesn't mean anything without the salvation that comes from Jesus. Once Jesus has saved us and redeemed us, once He has claimed us as God's children, as His brothers and sisters, then the changes happen through the Holy Spirit where we truly start becoming what God has claimed us to be – holy and righteous in His sight. Once we're washed in the blood of the Lamb, then we start smelling like the sweet fragrance of love and joy and kindness and goodness that are a blessing to our God.

This leads to my last thought: *if it's all about Jesus, then His death to Himself is a model for us to die to ourselves and live for Him.* The picture in this passage of Jesus is curious – He is lion and lamb at the same time, strength and power and weakness and sacrifice all at once. In the Greek, it's clear that the lamb just doesn't look slain but is “as slain.” Jesus was dead and risen, yet He bears the marks of being our sacrifice. He gave His life to purchase ours, to reconcile us to the Father. He did not live for His own pleasure but ours.

As His followers, as His priests, as ambassadors for the Kingdom of God, the model we have is one where we too are “slain” like our lion lamb King. Our response modeled in this passage is one of worship. Worship of our King means forgetting self, humbling ourselves, honoring Jesus the worthy One, and putting aside ourselves to fulfill God's purposes for us.

As Paul's letters remind us, there is a lot for us to learn in putting aside ourselves. But the core of Scripture teaches us to focus on Jesus. When you have your eyes on Jesus, you can't focus on satisfying your own desires because they're off on the periphery. When you have your eyes on Jesus, the sins that easily entangle you are out of the spotlight. Jesus taught us that every moral idea God wants us to follow is summed up by “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” When we are focused on Jesus, God and neighbor rather than ourselves become the center of our existence.

Today's passage shows us that Jesus is indeed the One worthy of all glory, honor, and praise. The good news of the Bible is summed up in His life, death, and resurrection for our sake. May we leave here today not thinking we've finished worshipping, but agreeing we've just begun. May the Holy Spirit so work in our hearts that we too would join with all creation praising our Savior all the time. May our whole lives be worship to the One able to break the seals and fulfill God's plans for eternity.