

**Who Is Worthy?**  
**(Rev. 5:1-14)**

Last week, as I was preparing this sermon, I told Amanda that I was going to be preaching from Revelation 5. The look on her face was just about as surprised as I expected it to be! There are two types of people when it comes to the book of Revelation: There are people who read it over and over, read commentaries on it, read books by pastors and theologians on it, and have both the Kirk Cameron and the Nicolas Cage versions of *Left Behind*. Then, there are the people who avoid Revelation like the plague. Both sets of people, I believe, react in the way they do for the same reason: All the end-times symbolism and imagery. Some people long to know all they can about what everything represents. Some people get such a headache from it that they shun it altogether. We are going to be neither of those groups this morning because we are not making a deep dive into eschatology. We aren't going to parse out the symbolism of Revelation and try to decide if the locusts are actually helicopters or if the mark of the beast is a barcode or a tattoo.

Another reason I believe people react as they do to Revelation is fear of an uncertain future. Gallup and Barna polls consistently point to our anxiety regarding the future. If you ask the average person if they think society is going to get worse or better as time goes on, the answer is invariably negative. A certain atheist professor was once asked his thoughts on the future of mankind. His reply was that he was not very optimistic, because history demonstrates that man does not treat man very well. His conclusion was that the world is destined for certain destruction. The book of Revelation can lead to some fear about the future, as well, with its discussion of the Antichrist, the tribulation of God's wrath, and the persecution of believers. However, it is important to remember that above all, Revelation is a book of hope. Our subject this morning, Revelation 5, is a compelling reason for hope. In chapters 4 and 5, we are given a rare privilege: a glimpse into the throne room of God. The apostle John, enduring exile on the island of Patmos, records seven letters to seven churches

from the mouth of Christ himself, then writes that a voice called him to “Come up here.” “At once,” John says, “I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.” The remainder of chapter 4 is John’s attempt to describe the indescribable: the glory and majesty of God the Father seated on His throne, surrounded by angels singing His praises. We then come to chapter 5, which contains our main idea for this morning:

**Because He is both sacrificial Lamb and victorious Lion, Jesus is worthy to redeem creation and to receive all honor, glory, and blessing.** Jesus is worthy. This is a deep and powerful concept in three words and Revelation 5 helps us unpack it. Examine with me.

## **He Is The Lion Who Conquers**

**\*\*Read Rev. 5:1-5\*\***

1 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. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” 3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, 4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 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.”

Revelation 5 opens with the camera lens still fixed on God the Father, seated on his throne. John notices a new detail, though: a scroll, with writing on both sides and seven seals, resting in the right hand of God. As John notices this, a mighty angel steps forward and, in a loud voice, issues a challenge to all creation. “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” At this point, the obvious question becomes, “What is the scroll?” Unfortunately, John doesn’t directly record the nature of the scroll. There are several theories: the scroll is a last will and testament of sorts; the scroll is Ezekiel’s book of lamentation, mourning, and woe; the

scroll is the sealed book of the end times from Daniel's vision. Others believe the scroll is essentially a title deed to creation foreshadowed in Jeremiah 32 or that the scroll is the remainder of the book of Revelation. I find compelling evidence for these two interpretations, but again, we cannot know for sure.

We can, however, look at the facts we do have and make an assessment regarding the importance of the scroll. First, the scroll is held in the right hand of God the Father. This alone communicates its extreme value and importance. Second, each seal that is removed, allowing the scroll to be unrolled a little more each time, advances the narrative of Revelation. This would seem to indicate that the scroll contains the rest of redemptive history and that the one who is able to answer the angel's challenge and open the scroll is worthy to advance that history. Third, after the final seal is broken in chapter 11 and the scroll is fully opened, loud voices in heaven declare, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever." Many verses in Scripture refer to Satan as the ruler of this age or the ruler of this world, but here in Revelation, the opening of the scroll has granted ownership of the world's kingdoms to the opener. This is foreshadowed in Jeremiah 32, when Jeremiah, by right of kinship, is able to purchase and redeem a piece of land that had been lost by a cousin. Just as Boaz foreshadows a kinsman-redeemer who is able to rescue His bride, Jeremiah foreshadows a kinsman-redeemer who is able to reclaim creation.

The angel's challenge remains, however. "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" To John's great disappointment, no one is found to be worthy. No one, John records, "in heaven or on earth or under the earth." In short, no one in all creation is able to answer the angel's challenge. Not Adam. Not Moses. Not Joshua or Caleb. Not Daniel or Isaiah. Not Peter or John or Paul. None of the giants of faith found in Hebrews are worthy to answer the challenge and John weeps.

Why does John weep? Certainly, we can assume that John is disappointed to not find out what is in the scroll. It's entirely understandable to weep over something we desire. A personal example: **\*senior year state championship\*** But John's own record seems to indicate that he was more than just a little sad. The ESV says that John "began to weep loudly." The CSB records that John "wept and wept." Clearly, this is more than just a desire for knowledge that has John weeping. Revelation tells us that the scroll had writing on both sides. Maybe the scroll was full of content on both sides or, as was custom in John's time, the scroll had its contents on the inside and a summary of the contents written on the outside. Maybe John could read this writing or maybe John simply knew in his spirit, as he was in the Holy Spirit, that the scroll contained the conclusion of history and the redemption that creation has been groaning for. I don't think it's a great leap to assume that John would desperately desire this redemption, having seen many of his friends murdered for their faith and being in exile for his own. But he weeps loudly because no one is found worthy to claim the scroll. Until.

"Weep no more," an elder tells John. "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." Jesus appears in heaven, worthy and able to open the scroll and redeem creation. He is worthy because He is the conquering Lion. In calling Jesus the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the elder reaches back all the way to Genesis 49, when a dying Jacob is blessing his sons. "Judah is a young lion," he says. "He crouches; he lies down like a lion or a lioness - who dares to rouse him?" Jacob then issues a messianic prophecy. "The scepter will not depart from Judah or the staff from between his feet until he whose right it is comes and the obedience of the people belongs to him." Now, He has come. The Lion, who was prophesied to inherit the scepter and the obedience of the people, has come. The Root of David, who came from David's line and yet existed before him, has come. As the Root of David, He is the true king of Israel and the redeeming King of the Jews. As the Lion of Judah, he is the conquering Messiah and the

deified King of Kings. And He is worthy to answer the mighty angel's challenge. He, and He alone, is worthy to open the scroll because He, and He alone, has conquered death and the grave. Then, in verse 6, we see another side of the wonderful mystery of Christ on display.

### **He Is The Lamb That Was Slain**

**6** 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. **7** And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

As John turns his attention to see the Lion the elder has spoken of, you can almost feel the suspense. In his record of these events, John pushes back the reveal, perhaps to place emphasis on this remarkable thing that he sees. He sets the stage: "Between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders," he writes. And then we see what John sees. Not a Lion at all, but "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." This is the great mystery, that both of these are Christ. The Lion achieves victory through the sacrifice of the Lamb. John writes that the Lamb looked "as though it had been slain." The Greek form of slain in this verse is in the perfect tense, conveying a sense of completion and permanence. John is not told that this Lamb has been slain. He can see it with his own eyes. There is a permanent sense of the Lamb's death present, perhaps through scars, just as Christ kept the scars of His crucifixion when he appeared to His disciples. However, even as John notes that the Lamb appears as one slain, he also records that this Lamb is not fallen in death, but is standing in victory. In Revelation 1, when Jesus first appears to John, he tells him, "I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."

The narrative of redemptive history is thick with the imagery of the Lamb. In Genesis, as Abraham leads Isaac, the child of the promise, up the mountain to be sacrificed to the Lord, we read that "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering." In Exodus, we

see the Passover lamb, “a lamb without blemish,” welcomed into the home as a pet before being sacrificed to protect the people of Israel. In Isaiah, we read that the suffering servant was “led as a lamb to the slaughter.” In John’s own gospel, we hear John the Baptist declare that here is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” All of these prophecies and foreshadowings find their fulfillment in the Lamb who is standing as though it had been slain. Jesus is the lamb for the burnt offering. He is the true Passover lamb who shields His people from death. He is the suffering servant led as a lamb to the slaughter. But this lamb in the throne room of God did not just die. This Lamb died and is alive forevermore. This Lamb is a Lion-like lamb. This lamb has seven horns and seven eyes. Horns in the context of Revelation’s apocalyptic literature represent strength. Eyes, in the same context, represent wisdom and knowledge. Seven, in this context, represents perfection. This is an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Lamb that stands in victory though it was slain. And as John records in verse 6, “He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.” This is the Lamb who is worthy to answer the challenge and open the scroll. This Lamb, who in sacrificial death became a conquering Lion, is worthy to bring God’s redemptive plan to completion and redeem creation. And finally,

## **He Is The Lord Who Is Worthy**

The title of this sermon echoes the challenge of the mighty angel: “Who is worthy?” By now, we should have an answer to our question, but as the Lamb takes the scroll, the following verses leave no doubt.

**8** And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. **9** 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,  
**10** and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,

and they shall reign on the earth.”

**11** 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, **12** 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!”

**13** 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!”

**14** And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

When the Lamb takes possession of the scroll, a new song of praise bursts forth and spreads from the throne room of heaven to all creation. It begins with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. In verse 11, John notes that “myriads and myriads and thousands and thousands” of angels join in. And in verse 13, “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea” begins to participate in this new song. What is the focus of this song? The worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The song echoes what we have already learned from John’s vision. The Lord is worthy because He is the Lion who is victorious over sin, death, and the grave. The Lion is victorious because He is the Lamb who laid down His life. And all of creation cannot help but celebrate.

The new song, as it reveals the Lord’s worthiness, points listeners back to the the most significant event in history: the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

The song reminds us again that the Lamb was slain. But this song and this entire scene from the throne room of heaven remind us that *only* the Lamb was worthy to be slain. Only the Lamb of God could truly be without spot or blemish, a perfect Passover lamb. Only the Lamb of God could come to earth and live wholly righteously. Only the Lamb of God could provide a once-and-for-all sufficient sacrifice.

The song reminds us that Christ, by His blood, “ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Sit with that thought for a moment. Christ is worthy to forgive sin and ransom people from death. We can do nothing to earn forgiveness. We can do nothing to save ourselves. We deserve death for the treason we have committed against the king of the universe. But Christ has done everything to ransom us. To borrow a quote from J.D. Greear, “We are not worthy to be forgiven, but Christ is worthy to forgive.”

The song reminds us that Jesus has made us “a kingdom, and priests to our God.” Again, only Jesus is worthy to do such a thing. Remember that at His death, the curtain of the temple split in two. The Lamb’s worthy sacrifice, accepted by God as atonement for sins, and the Lion’s victory over death and the grave, made the Lord worthy to appoint us as priests to God with direct access to the one who sits on the throne.

Only Christ is worthy to accomplish these things. Only Christ is worthy to redeem creation. And as the living beings and elders and angels and all creation declare, because of his sacrifice and victory, Christ is worthy to receive all blessing and glory and honor forever and ever.

## **Conclusion/Invitation**

This morning, let the worthiness of Christ be cause for celebration. If you are a Christ-follower, rejoice that there is no need to fear the future. The future is held securely in the hand of the one who is worthy to bring it to a close. Rejoice that there is no need to fear the present. The present is held securely in the hand of the one who is able to walk with us through it. If you are not a Christ-follower, if you have never repented of your sin, rejoice that Christ is worthy to forgive. Rejoice that He provided the perfect sacrifice on a cross outside Jerusalem and that he stands ready to redeem creation. And remember, as we close in worship this morning, that He is worthy of all blessing and honor and glory.