

## “Declare the Worthiness of the Lamb”

### *Revelation 5*

As we look at the last book of the Bible this morning, it shouldn't surprise us that we see a reference to Jesus as the Lamb of God here in Rev. 5. Rev. 4-5 is one unit where John was taken up to heaven to the very throne of God. Back in Ch. 1 John was visited by the resurrected Jesus on the island of Patmos where John was exiled for preaching the gospel. In this vision Jesus told John in 1:17-19,

*Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

<sup>19</sup> *“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.*

I believe v.19 gives us an outline of Revelation, Ch. 1 referring to what John just saw, Ch's. 2-5 about what is now and Ch.'s 6-22 about what will take place later. Ch's 2-3 are the 7 messages to 7 known historical churches in John's day but I believe that Jesus chose 7 to indicate the 7 represent the whole church, every church at any time. There are truths that each church must take to heart and apply as we wait for the final end time program called the Day of the Lord or Daniel's 7 weeks. I firmly believe that Ch.'s 6-19 clearly teach about things that will happen in that final 7 years which will lead up to the 1000-year reign of Jesus on earth in Rev. 20 and the ultimate new heaven and earth in Ch. 21-22.

But we can't understand what's going to happen in Ch's 6-22 if we don't understand what's going on in heaven in Ch. 4-5. Understanding God and Jesus' purpose and roles helps us make sense of what takes place here.

The apostle John had been caught up to heaven where he saw the throne of God and His spectacular glory. He also saw four strange living creatures – cherubim – who guard the presence of God and who never cease praising His holiness. They and the 24 elders on smaller thrones around God's throne engage in continual worship praising God saying,

*“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being” (4:11)*

The focus in heaven so far has been the throne of God. John can't keep his eyes away from the glory of God on the throne. Now he notices something in God's hand. It's a 7-sealed scroll with writing on both sides. This was familiar in John's day. A 7-sealed scroll was a will, listing someone's disbursement for other's inheritance. Seven witnesses sealed 7 strings tied around it with wax seals. One of the witnesses was the executor as appointed by him whose will it was. Only he could open it and reveal how the estate is divided and who gets the inheritance.

Since this will is God's will, it describes who gets God's inheritance – earth! John has been taken up to God's presence where he was going to be told about “*What will take place*” after the church is removed from the earth. God is about to reveal His will for earth and who will receive His holdings. But there's a problem. No earthly saint or heavenly angel is worthy enough to be the executor of God's will. John “*wept and wept*”. The word for weep here is the agonized wailing at the death of a loved one. John is greatly disturbed that we don't know how and when God's people will

ultimately get God's inheritance. If there is no one worthy to reveal God's plan then God's plan can't happen.

Thankfully Jesus now comes *as the Lamb, as if it had been slain*. Why is Jesus depicted this way? But Jesus does show up here. The deed for earth will not fall into the wrong hands. So, through John God reassures us ...

## **Don't Lose Hope in God's Promises** **(5:1-5)**

Jesus hasn't returned yet. He's still coming. John is initially upset because if no one can execute God's will, how can the people of God receive our inheritances? Remember

### ***Our future is in good hands (v.1)***

Where is the deed to earth? In the right hand of God who is calmly sitting down. The right hand is the hand of power. God is in control. He's on His throne, overseeing and steering us and the world to its ultimate end. Listen to Ps. 47:7-9,

*"For God is the king of all the earth; sing to Him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on His holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted."*

Our inheritance is in God's hand. We're in good hands, so don't be unsettled or disturbed. A sealed document means the contents can't be tampered with. Nothing can change what is written in it. No one can touch it except God and Jesus. We can trust God's future promises.

And yet – how often do we say, 'Yeah but when you look at the world around us . . .' Trust God. Trust His Word. The reason we doubt is because we don't believe the Word enough. That's been Satan's strategy since the Garden of Eden. *'Did God really say . . .?'* We need to stay in God's Word and believe it even if we don't see it happening yet. A lack of knowledge in the Word results in a lack of confidence in the God of the Word. Satan has done a good job of convincing Christians that reading God's Word isn't relevant. Or that spending time with the people of God isn't exciting enough. Or that praying really doesn't change things. Or that serving God will really help people know God or grow in God. Uninformed Christians are unsettled Christians.

John sees a "mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?' No one was found – alive or dead – who can open the scroll. Not Billy Graham. Not Charles Spurgeon. Not even Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, the apostle Paul – not even the apostle John is worthy to open the scroll. Why not? Because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We can't go up to the glory of God and take this scroll. Our sin separates us from God.

But there is One who is worthy. As John weeps one of the 24 elders – who are not weeping, they know! – tells John *"Do not weep! See, [BEHOLD!] the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."*

As John will be reminded,

### ***Our future was settled at the cross (vv.2-7)***

The elder says to John essentially, 'Have you forgotten the prophecies of the Messiah, the Lion of Judah (Gen. 49:9), the root of David (Is. 11:1) has 'overcome' [literally - Nike]. Jesus overcame death (the penalty of sin) but didn't die for His own sins. He died as an unblemished sacrifice for our sins and rose from the grave, defeating the enemy and breaking the curse of death that started in Gen. 3.

Now we've come full circle. In the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned, God said one day a seed from the woman would crush the serpent's head. God communicated through Israel's history that only a sacrifice could cover sin, must be unblemished, God Himself would provide the Lamb, God Himself would initiate the offering for our sins and we must believe that applying the blood of Jesus the Lamb to our lives would spare us from God's wrath.

What will Jesus do from Rev. 6-19? Open the sealed will unleashing God's final wrath of judgment – not all at once – but over a 7-year period of time offering people a chance to repent and turn to God. How do we know this?

*6:12 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, <sup>13</sup> and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. <sup>14</sup> The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.*

*<sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup> They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! <sup>17</sup> For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

*9:20 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. <sup>21</sup> Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

*16:8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. <sup>9</sup> They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.*

*10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony <sup>11</sup> and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.*

When the last bowl judgment is unleashed, we read this,

*16:19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. <sup>20</sup> Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. <sup>21</sup> From the sky huge hail-stones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.*

Jesus will accomplish and fulfill all God's will leading up to and including "the last day". Our future is secure. Even though Jesus is referred to as the Lion of Judah when John turns to see Him He is shown as a slain Lamb. 'Who had been slain' means He was but now is not. He was standing. And moving.

The seven horns symbolize perfect and complete strength. The seven eyes symbolizing all-seeing. The seven spirits – or could be translated 7-fold spirit – referring to His knowing everything that goes on in the earth. He came and took the scroll. The Lamb who had been slain, overcame.

Jesus overcame the temptation of sin, death, the penalty of sin and rose from the grave. In the Greek the word “overcame” comes even before ‘Lion of Judah’ and ‘Root of David’ Behold John, the one who overcame, he’s the Lion of Judah, the root of David. This is the same word used in all 7 letters to the churches and becomes an encouraging promise: ‘to the one who overcomes I will give . . .’. Jesus overcame so we can receive all God’s promises.

This is what gives us hope in the future promises of God, Jesus the sacrificial Lamb of God. Believe by faith that Jesus alone is worthy and able to guarantee God’s future promises. No other human being was able to die for the sins of the world. That sets Jesus apart. But He was no mere human being. He is God who set aside His awesome glory to be one of us and to live as we live and to die a horrible death, just like the lambs were slaughtered for sacrifices in the Old Testament.

He takes the scroll and all heaven goes crazy – in a good way. This is better than the Toronto Maple Leafs winning the Stanley Cup this year! This is more exciting and causes more crowd excitement than the most exciting event you have ever witnessed!! And knowing that – knowing that heaven goes crazy when Jesus takes the scroll which sets into motion God’s final week/seven years of prophecy which will result in the Kingdom coming to earth – should change us now. How? This should . . .

## **Live With Joyful Hope Because of the Lamb** **(5:8-14)**

Song and praise erupt from the throne and spreads as if a bomb had gone off. First the 24 elders and 4 living creatures sing a new song (vv.8-10). Then it spreads to the thousands of angels who give loud praise to the worthy one. Then it spreads where? To every spot in heaven, on earth, under the earth and on the sea. A tsunami of praise erupts because Jesus will execute the will of God and guarantee our inheritance. There are 4 ways this should give us joy and confidence now.

### ***Pray with joy and confidence (v.8)***

Ever wondered if our prayers go anywhere? We’re told right here where they go - in the presence of God! According to v.8 our prayers are in the elders’ hands. God values our prayers so much He puts them in golden bowls of incense. Our prayers ascend to God as a pleasing aroma.

If we know for sure that our prayers arrived in the presence of God, wouldn’t that make us pray with more joy knowing God loves us enough to listen to everything we say? If we know for sure that Jesus intercedes as well for us and that the Spirit interprets our wordless prayers, would we not pray more? And if we know for sure our Saviour will rule one day on this earth with absolute victory, wouldn’t we pray more confidently for spiritual victories here on earth? When God answers one of our prayers that encourages us to pray more and with greater confidence.

James 4:2 says, *“You don’t have because you don’t ask God”*.

Or *“When you do ask you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives.”* (4:3)

The 24 elders and four living creatures sing a new song. What do they sing about? That Jesus is worthy to open the scroll because by his blood He purchased for God people from every tribe,

language, people and nation (v.9). Wow. You mean to say that we already know that tons of people from every tribe, nation, language and people will get saved? Yes. If we know thousands more people will get saved we'll . . .

### ***Witness with joy and confidence (v.9a)***

If we knew someone would respond to the gospel when we shared it, wouldn't that encourage us more to do it, even though it seems like so few do? And we know that part. Jesus already told us in the parable of the soils that when we spread His message Satan might snatch the Word away so some won't hear it. Some will show an initial interest, while others will look to follow but the worries of life will cause them to quit on Jesus. But some will respond and multiply and make a difference for God on earth. We know we won't always be successful, but we also know that since many people from all over the world will still get saved, that helps us to be His witnesses here in our Jerusalem, and to our Judeans and Samaritans and to the ends of the earth. We will succeed at times. Let that make us want to share Christ more so we can experience the joy that comes when we see firsthand someone getting saved.

The 24 elders and 4 living creatures tell us what else will come as a result of the scroll being opened. We will be a

*kingdom of priests to serve our God and we will reign on the earth" (v.10).*

When Jesus returns to the earth, He takes back what Satan stole and we receive our inheritance. First, the millennial reign of Jesus promised to Israel and then in the New Jerusalem. In between there Satan will try one last time to take it back and defeat Jesus, but He will be tossed in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

If we know we have future ministry waiting for us, wouldn't that help us

### ***Serve God with joyful confidence (v.10)***

If we know our spiritual apprenticeship here on earth will affect how we will serve Him in eternity won't we want to serve Jesus with joyful confidence now? We know that our labour won't be in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). We know we'll be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ and receive our crowns. If we know all this then does it change us now?

The 24 elders and four living creatures are joined by the angels and every living creature to do what? Sing about Jesus' worthiness. If all these millions of people will be singing Jesus and God's praises forever shouldn't that cause us to . . .

### ***Worship with joyful confidence (vv.11-14)***

Do you listen to music that glorifies God and elevates Jesus' name every day? Do you sing (or hum) about Jesus throughout the day? Shouldn't the Christian life now be a rehearsal for the future? If we know Jesus will return and establish His rule on earth because God's final will says so, shouldn't that give us cause for joy and singing now? Our lack of joy is probably a result of focusing on the wrong things. We complain and grumble a lot. We forget the assurance of Rev 4-5.

Ironically, the phrase 'Worthy are You' in John's time was reserved only for the emperor; Caesar. John was in exile because he believed Jesus was worthy. Satan and the world are temporary squatters, acting as if this is their world when they have no right to it. Satan is trying desperately to take over all this world. While he wins some battles, our presence is a thorn in his side. A reminder

that God is still on His throne. The deed to the world is securely in God's hand. A day is coming when only One can and will approach God and take the scroll, break the seals which will unleash God's wrath on earth so that some will come to know Him while others will turn further away from Him.

The scroll will also unveil the future plans of God already promised in the Scriptures. Jesus is the builder and architect of our future home. His rule is not in question, we're just waiting for 'when'. In the meantime, does knowing all this change us now? We should live with joy and confidence because only Jesus, our Saviour is worthy to rule this world. John was temporarily distraught and upset because he didn't see Jesus come yet. Don't let Jesus' delay unsettle you. He's actually giving us more time to serve Him, to pray for more people to get saved and to sing his praises in preparation for that future day in glory.

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