



“Worthy to Worship”

Revelation Chapter 5

A man in Long Beach, California, went into a fast-food chicken restaurant to buy lunch for himself and the lady with him. He took his order of chicken and drove to a nearby park for a picnic. When he opened the box, he was surprised to see money instead of chicken.

The restaurant manager kept the earnings in a chicken box to prevent robbery. Somehow the wrong box was given to the customer.

Well, the man quickly returned his picnic basket of cash to the restaurant. The manager was elated. He said, “Stick around. I want to call the newspaper and have them take your picture. You’re the most honest guy in town.”

The customer objected. When the manager pressed him for a reason not to have his picture in the paper, the man finally admitted, “I’m married, and the woman I’m with is not my wife.”

That honest man, really wasn’t the most honest guy in town, was he? He really wasn’t a man of worthy character.

Who is? Who has led a spotless life? Which one of us is pure? Who is truly worthy?

Our Bible text begins by asking that question. *“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”* In Bible times, only someone’s Last Will and Testament would be a document that was a scroll sealed with 7 seals. So, you might think of the scroll as God’s will for this earth, as the deed to this world.

The scroll contains God’s judgement for all that has been and his plans for all that will be. It contains wonderful things for some. It contains real serious things for some. It’s God’s plan to set this world right. There is a scroll, friends, and what that means is there’s a meaning and purpose behind this world.

Whoever has the scroll has authority to rule the earth. So this question, ***“Who is worthy to open the scroll?”*** is real important. Who is worthy to rule the earth? Who is capable of setting things right?

And the answer comes back: nobody. Throughout human history we anoint kings and we elect presidents, and we hope this time we’ll get it right. This time peace and justice will triumph, but they don’t.

Forget about the rest of the world for a moment. I made plans. I make New Year’s resolutions and form good intentions. I vow this time that if I can’t change the world at least I’ll change myself. At least I’ll open my own scroll. But I can’t. That’s why John weeps. He weeps for the failure of the whole human race. No human being is worthy.

Then one of the elders comes to John and says, ***“Do not weep for there is One who is worthy.”*** For in all the universe there is one man, he says, who is able in God’s eyes to hold authority and rule the earth. And John sees a lamb and over and over and over the song is sung, “He is worthy, he is worthy.”

I want to tell you from this passage why He is worthy of everything that you can give him. Why He is worthy of every ounce of your devotion and every beat of your heart.

There are three things. First of all, look down in verse nine at this great song of the worthiness of the lamb: ***“They sing a new song, ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; because You were slain.’”***

This is a striking thing to say, ***“You are worthy because you were slain.”*** And the use of that term “slain” is very significant. That’s a term from the Old Testament that was used to describe what happened to sacrificial animals. They were born and bred to be slain or slaughtered. And a major part of the ceremony of slaughtering a sacrifice in Bible times, was the transferring of sins and guilt from a person to that animal. When a lamb was slain or sacrificed, it carried somebody’s guilt and died to pay for that guilt so that the person offering the sacrifice was forgiven.

When Jesus was slain, He not only suffered physical pain and death. He not only suffered the humiliation of being mocked by

mobs. He suffered the spiritual agony of bearing upon Himself the sins of the world -- yours and mine.

Think about the most painful experience you've ever had -- the most painful guilt -- when you betrayed someone you love, when you had an abortion, when you lied or stole, and it was revealed openly, and you were in agony over it. Think about that and then multiply that one experience times thousands of other sins in your life. And then add the other times that you may have been too hard-hearted to even notice.

Then multiply that billions of times over for the sins of the whole earth, the whole human race, the guilt and horror of every sin -- deceit, gossip, every act of sexual abuse, the devastation of war, prejudice, the whole sordid history of human fallenness. Imagine one person experiencing within himself the indescribable nightmare of all of that guilt and remorse as if he had done each thing, bearing the weight of all that. Imagine one feeling directed upon himself the wrath of God for all that sin.

Now, imagine that burden falling on a heart that from all eternity had never once known the slightest shadow of guilt. Then you begin to understand what Paul meant when he said, "*Christ ...[became] the curse for us. He who knew no sin became sin for our sakes.*" You think about that.

Here's the point: As the sacrifice, the One Who was slain, the One destined to carry the weight of all sin of all time, He took on Himself the Father's wrath so you could be wholly free. You will never face God's wrath. You will never face it.

All you will know is the smile of God on your life. All you will know for all eternity is God's grace and God's pardon in spite of all of the sins that you have committed. All you will know is God's loving hand on your shoulder and God's loving embrace around your body.

You will never experience the wrath of God or the punishment for sin. You will never know the devastation of that. It would have killed you and me, but He took it. And the elders and the angels see the extent of this love, and they just cry out, "*You are worthy for you were slain.*" So you and I are free.

Then they go on to the second thing. The Lamb is worthy because He was slain, because He died for us. Then it says, ***"You are worthy because ... with Your blood You purchased men [people, humans] for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.*** Mark 10:45 says that ***"The Lamb is worthy because he gave his life a ransom for many."***

In John's day, people were quite familiar with this ransom idea. When somebody became a slave, maybe their side lost a war, their freedom would be set at a price. And theoretically, they could buy it back, but a slave didn't have much earning power.

Somebody else might come along and pay the ransom price for them, but that didn't happen often. So slaves generally lived and died their whole lives long knowing that freedom was just a ransom price away, but knowing they'd never pay it. They'd die slaves. They couldn't pay that price.

There's kind of a modern picture of this. About 20 years ago a powerful movie called "Schindler's List" came out. Have any of you seen it? The story is true, of a German businessman, Oscar Schindler, who lived during World War II. He sees a whole race of people that's headed for destruction, but he's got money. He realizes he could use his factory, his money, to buy human lives, to save them from death.

There's one scene where he's got a group of Jewish men coming to his factory where they'll be saved, but their children, their wives are on another train headed for death in a Nazi concentration camp. Do you remember what happens? He goes to a German officer and pours out a little bag of diamonds and says, "I want to buy those people."

The Bible says when you see that, you see something of the heart of God. God who says, "I would give up everything I have to buy every life I can." And Jesus did just that – He gave up everything He had to buy you. In the Bible, Peter says, ***"You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish."***

Martin Luther picked up on this idea, and this is how he said it in some words that are real familiar to many: ***“I believe that Jesus Christ ... has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from sin, death, and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death”***

The elders and the living creatures see the Lamb who, at the price of his own blood, ransomed people, and they say, ***“You are worthy.”***

Then a third thing, and this is real good news. The Lamb is worthy because He conquered. ***“Then the elder said to me, ‘Do not weep; see, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered,’”*** has overcome.

This is a very important word in the Book of Revelation. It's the Greek word, "nikeh." From it we get the word "Nike," you know, the company. It's from the Greek word for victory.

Now think in our day, think about a conqueror, a warrior who always overcomes, who has a will to win. Who comes to your mind? LeBron James? Tom Brady? Michael Phelps (the swimmer), Mookie Betts who seems to spark the LA Dodgers to victory? Who?

The elder says, ***“Don't weep, for the Lion of Judah, the Root of David”*** -- now these are Messianic terms from the Old Testament. These are very strong terms for the Messiah. But he comes in the form of a lamb, a humble servant. John says, ***“I turned and I looked, and I saw a Lamb.”*** But what a lamb!! He has 7 horns. A horn is power, and having 7 horns means this lamb has ABSOLUTE POWER. He has 7 eyes. This means he knows and sees all things.

We use this kind of language today. We say that mothers have eyes ... where ...? (On the back of their heads.) Now we don't literally mean that mothers have 2 eyes on the back of their heads – we mean that moms know what's going on – there's no getting away with stuff around them. This lamb is a victor – He has 7 horns (absolute power) and 7 eyes (He knows and sees everything. He's a sheep with attitude.

This conqueror is Jesus. He conquered guilt by entering a fallen world and living a flawless life. He conquered the evil one by resisting his most enticing temptations one on one all alone in the desert. He conquered sin by paying for it all with His life on a cross. He conquered hell by winning the way for you and me and all people to go to heaven ... simply by accepting heaven as His free gift to you.

There's a story about a woman who had been diagnosed with cancer and told that it would be terminal in just a few months. The doctor told her she needed to make preparations to die, so she contacted a pastor and told him how she wanted things arranged at her funeral, which songs to have sung, which Scripture to have read, what to have said. She wanted to be buried with her Bible. Then she said, "There's one more thing." And the pastor asked her, "What?" She said, "This is important. I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand." The pastor didn't know what to say. He asked her, "Why?"

She said, "Whenever I was eating a special dinner, my favorite part was when whoever was cleaning the dishes off from the main course would lean over and say, 'You can keep your fork.' It was my favorite part because I knew it meant something great was coming. It wasn't jello. It was something with substance like cake or pie."

So she said, "I just want people to see me there in my casket with a fork in my hand, and I want them to wonder, 'What's with the fork?' Then I want you to tell them, 'Something better is coming, so keep your fork.'"

And at the service, people saw the dress that she had chosen, and the Bible that she loved, but they kept asking the same question: "What's with the fork?" And the pastor explained that she wanted them to know that for her -- for anyone who dies in Christ-- this isn't a day of defeat. This is a day of celebration. The real party is just starting, for the Lamb has conquered, and something better is coming. So, friends, keep your fork.

Is He worth it? Jesus was slain – He is the sacrifice that took all your wrongs and guilt and died to pay for it all with His own life.

Jesus ransomed you, purchased you, by paying the price to set you free.

He is the conqueror, ... and He gives that victory to you ... so keep your fork.

Again, let me ask you, is He worth it? Is He worth it to go on serving when you feel tired or unappreciated or misunderstood, or it feels like somebody else is getting all the recognition and not you?

Is He worth it to make the financial sacrifice of giving to God when people around you are making and keeping and spending a fortune, and you could keep the money to buy things you need or want so much? Is it worth it to always try to tell the truth when you know a lie could get you out of trouble? Is it worth it to persevere day after day, year after year in a painful marriage when part of you wants to run from it so badly? Is it worth it to talk about Jesus' love with a friend when you know you might be rejected?

Is it worth it all? YES! YES!! Because the Lamb is worth it.

That's why John closes this chapter with one of the great pictures of praise in Scripture. He says that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders praised God. John says, "*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders, they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.*" The idea is it's too many to count. And he says, "They're singing with full voice." Angels just flat out going for it, vocal cords straining if they have vocal cords.

Then he says in verse 13, "*And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea*" -- that's pretty much everybody. Now our mouths speak profanity, bitter words, hypocrisy, deceit, arrogance. All that will be silenced. No more words like that. In its place will be a single song of inexpressible beauty sung by the church and the angels and all creation.

One more detail about worship because this is about us. Look back to verse eight, "*When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp.*" What does the harp stand for in Revelation? An electric guitar?

I don't know what the instrumentation will be. But the idea behind it is it's for a heart that is so full that words just don't cut it. The spoken word is not capable of conveying the joy and gratitude and adoration and wonder that's in the human heart. Only music can express that kind of joy and gratitude. Who knows what form that will take?

Then just this and then we worship. ***"Holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."*** Friends, who are the saints? That's us. You're sitting next to one of them, and so is the person next to you. What John is saying, unbelievable as it seems, is that our worship right now is part of the praise of heaven in some way that we don't fully understand.

What we do right now is part of cosmic worship. Right now in this moment, Abraham and Moses and Mary and John, and maybe your mom or your dad, maybe somebody you know and love. And in the midst of all that, up there someplace there is a golden bowl with your name on it. John says, "It is full." And it becomes part of the praise of heaven.

John closed with these words: ***"Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, 'To the One that is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.' And the four living creatures said, 'Amen.' And the elders fell down and worshiped."***

Is He worth it to you? He is worthy, and this is our chance to tell him. So let's do it with our whole hearts.