

## #12 WORTHY IS THE LAMB (REV 5)

God revealed to Daniel through dreams that the kingdoms of men had become violent beasts dominating the earth. God also showed Daniel how these kingdoms would affect both the remnant of Israel and all God's holy people in the future. One terrifying kingdom stood out: *it would prevail over the saints and even destroy earthly Jerusalem*. But God would bring judgment and give the kingdom to his people. Everyone in the book of life would be delivered from tribulation. People would rise from the dust (resurrection) to either everlasting life or everlasting contempt.

Daniel was confused. Someone in Daniel's vision asked the angel, "*How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?*" The angel replied, "*When the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things will be finished.*" Basically, when God is done letting the holy people suffer, it will be done. This obviously wasn't satisfactory for Daniel. "*What will be the outcome of these things?*" But Daniel was told twice that this was for the end — "*seal the book.*"

Centuries later, God's people were enduring the tribulation Daniel saw. Those descended from Israel had suffered tribulation, but now God's new Israel was suffering it (often at the hands of the Jews). Some were exiled. Some were killed. Many were marginalized and suffered poverty. Christians in the U.S. have often enjoyed relative ease — maybe due to compromise with culture — but this is simply not the situation of many Christians elsewhere. The snake and his offspring have afflicted the woman and her offspring since the beginning. What will God do about the persecutors of God's people? About mankind's arrogance, rebellion, and idolatry? When will God bring the final victory of his kingdom?

**1. Who is worthy to open the scroll? (5:1-4)** The one on the throne holds a sealed scroll. We pray alongside believers of many generations, "*What will be the outcome of these things?*" but the mighty angel answers that question with another. "*Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?*" The scroll likely represents *the outcome of these things*: God's purposes for history. Daniel wondered it, Israel wondered it, now God's new Israel from all nations wonders it. How will God deal with the beasts, rescue his humans, and shape up all history?

But opening God's scroll and bringing the consummation of history requires the right person. And the sad answer to the angel's question "*Who is worthy?*" becomes apparent. The delayed answer drives the point home: *we hope* someone will be worthy, but no one in heaven or earth *is* worthy. From the beginning God declared that *the offspring of woman would crush the head of the snake*. But no one was found worthy to bring history's problems to a close. No one was worthy to open the scroll. At this point we may well hear ancient laments echoing in our minds.

*"The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. ... Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!"* (Psalm 14:2-3, 7 ESV)

*"So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene."* (Isaiah 59:14-16 NIV11)

Even God was appalled that there was no one to intervene, so it is natural that John would weep loudly when no one is found. This is no mere act. John has preached his whole life that Jesus is the man to bring history forward, but in that moment it seems that *still* no one is worthy and *still* God's people are going to be told — as Daniel was — "*seal the book,*" the time is not yet.

**2. The slain-lion-lamb who conquered is worthy (5:5-10).** None of the kings from David's "tree" were worthy to usher in all of God's promises, so God made the tree a stump (the exile of Judah and of David's dynasty). But God promised a root would grow up from the stump of David's family (cf. Isa. 11:1ff). He would have the Spirit, wisdom, righteousness, and power beyond all others — he would be worthy. Now the elder ends John's weeping by declaring that "*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 was unjustly judged to be worthy of death, but God declared Jesus holy and just — vindicating him by resurrection (cf. Ps. 16:10).<sup>76</sup> Jesus is the long anticipated conquerer of evil who rules the nations.

What happens next is revealing: John *hears* of the conquering lion (cf. Gen. 49:8-10), but he *sees* a slain lamb (cf. Ex. 12:1-13). These two images help explain *why* Jesus is worthy to open the scroll and bring God's purpose for history forward. King Jesus will conquer the wicked like a lion, but one of the ways he will do so is by means of his sacrificial death like a lamb.

Bauckham explains that these two images form one new image of "conquest by sacrificial death."<sup>77</sup> Jesus reigns with the Father *in the midst of the throne* (3:21; 5:6-7; 7:17; 12:5), revealing that "Christ's sacrificial death *belongs to the way God rules the world.*"<sup>78</sup> (cf. John 12:20-36) The judging actions that proceed from the throne are part of God's conquest against evil, but the sacrificial death of the Lamb is just as key.<sup>79</sup> God and the lamb conquer their enemies by both lion-like judgment and lamb-like sacrificial death. Some worshippers of the beast will be destroyed, but some will turn to worship the Lamb when they see the power and love coming from his throne.

How will they see this power and love?<sup>80</sup> The living creatures and elders proclaim that Christ's death has ransomed people *for God*. The Lamb will conquer as enemies see he was slain to free them from their sins (1:5), but he will continue to conquer through these enemies-turned-priests who reign on the earth. *God's ransomed priests are also part of how God will bring the outcome to "these things."* The Lion-Lamb is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because of what he has done and because he ransoms people who will participate in the scrolls contents. As we will see later, the Lamb's people will follow in the same path of conquest by sacrificial death. The offspring of woman — both singularly (Jesus) and collectively (his people) — must crush the head of the snake, but not without the snake striking their heels (Gen. 3:15).<sup>81</sup>

History has seen its fair share of both "lamb" Christians and "lion" Christians.<sup>82</sup> We can tend toward extremes. Many can only see the lion as the answer to the problem of evil: all enemies are unredeemable and the Son of David must destroy them. Many can only see the atoning death of the lamb as the answer: all enemies can be redeemed so eternal patience and forgiveness is in order. Still yet are those who want to sit back as mere observers: let God be God. Revelation offers a more involved answer through the simple image of the Lion-Lamb who ransoms priests. God's final victory over evil is accomplished by means of judgments that proceed from the throne, the cross, and the cross-shaped lives of those who follow the lamb.

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<sup>76</sup> I originally heard or read N.T. Wright point this out *somewhere*. I believe this is explored in *Jesus and the Victory of God*.

<sup>77</sup> Bauckham, 74. "The means by which the Davidic Messiah has won his victory is explained by the image of the Lamb, while the significance of the image of the Lamb is now seen to lie in the fact that his sacrificial death was a victory over evil."

<sup>78</sup> Bauckham, 64.

<sup>79</sup> God has continually been betrayed and pierced by his faithless people as Zechariah 11-12 portrays. The cross in part embodies this ancient story. God's conquest against evil plays out in both his judgment and his sacrificial love.

<sup>80</sup> Later, we will consider how the Holy Spirit (the seven spirits of God represented here by the lamb's seven horns and seven eyes) form the crucial link between the truth and the *knowledge* of the truth on earth.

<sup>81</sup> This theme will be explored in detail in Revelation 7 (the lamb's army of martyrs) and in Revelation 11 (the two witnesses who bring people to repentance through judgment and martyrdom).

<sup>82</sup> Wright, 54.

The offspring of the woman do crush the snake and his offspring, but they are not righteous, loving, powerful, or wise enough — they are not God enough — to conquer on their own (and neither is anyone in heaven.) So, God has become a human and intervened in Jesus. *“He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm achieved salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him.”* (Isaiah 59:16 NIV11)

***How does this vision answer our questions about what God is up to and how God will deal with the problem of evil? How does this correct common misconceptions in our minds and in our culture?***

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**3. Power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing to the lamb who was slain (5:11-14).** The worship of the living creatures and elders expands to millions of angels and then to every creature in all places. The living creatures and elders declare the Lamb’s worthiness to take the scroll, the angels declare his worthiness to receive power, etc., and all creatures pledge all blessing, honor, glory, and blessing to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

This scene in part serves to contrast false worship which will be seen later. The Lion-Lamb is declared worthy because he was slain, because he conquered, and because he ransomed people for God. But the dragon will offer compelling imitations. His earth-beast can receive wounds, yet still be healed and conquer its enemies too. Just as the Spirit is at work in John and the witnesses to proclaim the truth, the dragon and the sea-beast have an earth-beast to proclaim their deceptions.<sup>83</sup> The whole earth will marvel, *“Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”* But those who follow the Lamb know that only the cross leads to the crown.

The body of Revelation begins with a scene of worship because Revelation is really all about worship. Everyone is marveling, kneeling, and falling on their faces in front of something or someone. But what do we worship? And *how* do we worship?

Verse 12 answers. We worship by means of laying down our power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing at the feet of the Lamb who was slain. Wright explains, “Many rest content to have Jesus around the place for particular ‘spiritual’ purposes, but continue to assign riches, power, glory, and the rest to earthly forces and rulers.”<sup>84</sup> Worship is seen in who we praise, but it is also seen in where we assign our honor, power, and wealth. If we see that the world’s true hope is in earthly powers — political offices, armies, technology — that will be seen even in where our wealth goes. The Lion-Lamb is not only the answer to the forgiveness of our sins, he is worthy to open the scroll and he is worthy to deal with every form of the world’s evils.

***How can we practically live out the worship of verses 11-14 — that all power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing belongs to the Lamb? (1 Chronicles 29:1-22 offers a good example)***

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<sup>83</sup> Bauckham, 114-115.

<sup>84</sup> Wright, 58.