

Who is Worthy

Scripture: Rev 5

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March 28, 2010
Evening Service

People of God: The events in our text happen in the scene described in the previous chapter. Chapter Four is a scene of heavenly worship. The throne of God is in the middle, surrounded by the 24 elders and the four living creatures—representing God’s people and all of creation. All worship is directed towards the One upon the throne.

Everything seems to be in place. It seems so perfect and complete. What could ever go wrong in this scene of heavenly worship? But a problem does arise. In the hands of God, there is a sealed scroll. A question arises: *Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?* There is a great urgency in the question. It’s spoken in such a loud voice that it is heard not just in the heavenly courts but also throughout creation. When it looks as if no one is able to respond to this question, John begins to weep uncontrollably. Why? What is so important about this scroll? Why is it so crucial for it to be opened? What are the results when the scroll is unsealed and read?

In the days of the Apostle John, a scroll was their form of a book. They didn't have pages, bound together by covers like this book here. Instead, they would roll up one long piece of parchment, which would have to be unraveled in order to be read. Today, we have a similar idea with computers, when you scroll up and down a page.

The importance of this book is shown in fact that it is in right hand of God. With writing on both sides, it is a complete book. But it is sealed. It cannot be read. Whatever is inside remains secret and hidden.

But what could this scroll represent? Some think it is the OT, but that was not hidden. A few suggest it might be the Book of Life, with all the names of the elect. But this is too narrow of an interpretation, considering

what happens when those seals are broken. As the following chapters show, the breaking of the seals means the unleashing of judgment upon evil and the salvation of God's chosen people. In other words, this scroll represents God's plan of redemption. It symbolizes God's plan to re-assert his sovereignty over a sinful world.

For this scroll to remain sealed would mean that God's plan for the world would remain unfulfilled. For the scroll to remain unopened would mean that there would be silence concerning the way of salvation and God's judgment on sin. God's plan to save the creation and his image-bearers would be left unfulfilled. Think what that would mean. No liberation from sin. No judgment on evil. No new earth.

But if the scroll were opened, it would mean God's plan of salvation could be made known. An opened scroll would mean the plan of redemption could be fulfilled. Think what that means. Yes to salvation. Yes to liberation from sin. Yes to judgment on evil. Yes to a new earth.

That's what makes the question so urgent. *Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?* It's a question that echoes throughout the heavenly court. It reaches the whole of the creation. It even penetrates to the deepest darkness of hell. *Who is worthy?* Who would have the legal right to take the scroll? Who is capable of breaking the seals? Who would have the power? Whoever breaks the seals must be capable of fulfilling what is in the scroll. Who is able to destroy the forces of evil and ushering in a kingdom of peace and righteousness? *Who is worthy?*

What about the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and the host of angels? Are any of them worthy? They are part of the heavenly court. They are in the presence of God. They are doing the will of God, faithfully and earnestly. Yet none of them step forward.

The challenge comes to the earth, especially to man. Throughout the ages, man has sought to establish his own kingdom, tried to achieve his own way of securing peace and happiness. History is filled with failed attempts. From the Tower of Babel to King Nebuchadnezzar's empire; from Caesar Augustus' mighty Roman empire to Hitler's Third Reich. History tells the story of the failure of these attempts to usher in the golden age of peace and security. Can any part of the created order really be worthy to open the scroll? The answer is no.

The question even penetrates to the depths of hell. The devil wanted to replace God and rule the world. Here is his chance. The devil could try to take the scroll and wrestle control away from God. Yet hell remains silent.

Who is worthy? The answer comes in verse three. *But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look*

inside it. No one is worthy. Not even to peek inside. This situation causes John to weep uncontrollably.

But it is a weeping which is short-lived. Because one of the twenty-four elders says to John, *Do not weep! See, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.* When John looks up from his weeping he sees *a Lamb, looking as it as had been slain...He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.*

There is one who is worthy. He is Jesus Christ. But notice how he is described. When the elder refers to him he uses the image of a Lion—the symbol of royalty and power, but when John looks up he sees a Lamb, a symbol of meekness and sacrifice. A lion and a lamb. Two very opposite creatures, which normally would never be found together. Yet here they are used together to describe the One worthy to open the scroll.

The elder sees the lion from the tribe of Judah—a phrase taken from Genesis 49. He also describes him as the root of David, which is taken from Isaiah 11. Both of these passages describe the Messiah in royal terms. The Messiah was to be the great King, in the pattern of king David but far superior to king David. Because the Messiah would establish a kingdom that would last forever. He would rule over his people with justice and righteousness. There will be peace because he will have defeated the enemies of God.

That's what we find in Jesus. He has conquered the forces opposed to God. He has firmly established the kingdom of God. As the elder says: he has triumphed. As a result, he is worthy to take the scroll and open it up. He is able to fulfill the plan of God described in that scroll.

But how this Messiah-king has triumphed over the enemies of God is revealed in what John sees. He sees a Lamb, looking as it has been slain. Here we are reminded of Isaiah 53, where the Messiah is described as a suffering servant: *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering... he was led like a lamb to the slaughter.* The Messiah-King conquered the enemies of God--sin, death, and the devil--by means of his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. As verse nine says, by his blood we have been purchased for God.

Because Jesus is both the Lion and the Lamb, he is worthy. He has the legal right to take the scroll from the One who sits on the throne. He has earned the right to open the scroll. He has the authority to reveal the contents of the scroll. He has the power and the strength to carry what the scroll symbolizes: namely, the ultimate completion of the kingdom of God.

In Jesus, we have someone who is worthy. He has accomplished what

no angel could ever do; what no human could ever accomplish; what the devil would not want to do: Christ is worthy.

That means the plan of salvation can continue. The scroll can be broken and history can unfold to its appointed end. The gospel can be proclaimed to the four corners of the earth. Evil, injustice, and oppression will receive their word of judgment, while Christ will save his chosen people. Because Jesus is worthy to open the scroll, the kingdom of God will continue to advance and overtake the kingdom of darkness so that one day, everything will be made new.

The response to these events is one of worship. The tears of John are quickly replaced by the worship of heaven. When Christ takes the scroll, heaven erupts in worship. This worship gets expressed in song.

Three songs are recorded for us to hear. It's important to note the expansion of who sings these songs. The first song is sung by the inner heavenly court--the four living creatures and the 24 elders. The second song is sung by the multitudes of angels that surround this inner group. But that's not enough. Worship is not limited to heaven. It must extend over the whole creation. With the third song, John hears every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and on the sea, and all that is in them singing. The whole creation joins in giving praise to the One who is worthy.

As a result, even though right now, there is still rebellion against God, even though sin and evil seem to have the upper hand in our world, even though fellow believers are being persecuted for the faith, we can be assured that one day, the song of praise to Jesus will triumph. Worthy is the Lamb.

Not only must we notice who is singing, we must also pay attention to what they are singing. In these three songs, we have a description of Jesus and what he has done for us:

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.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have been purchased from our slavery to sin. We have a new owner—our rightful owner—God. No wonder we confess: “I am not my own, but belong... to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood.” No wonder, our response is one of worship.

Notice the universal nature of this redemption. Jesus saves people from every nation, race, and language group. The church is not for one ethnic group. The gospel isn't for one race. Here we have true multiculturalism at its best. Different people finding their unity in Jesus.

Now what is truly amazing in the opening song is not only the

incredible description of Jesus; we also have an incredible description of his followers. Verse ten says:

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God
and they will reign on the earth.

We have heard this promise before. In chapter 1:6, we are told that he “has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.” We share in the kingly and priestly tasks of our Savior.

The promise is given that we will reign on the earth. Notice that it does not say, heaven—but earth. This is our home and one day it will be cleansed of all sin and evil and we will exercise dominion over the whole creation as it was meant to be, from the very beginning.

But this isn’t just a future promise. Already now, as priests, we can serve our Lord, presenting our whole lives as a sacrifice of praise. Already now, as kings, we can claim this world for Christ. Already now, we can live as citizens of the Kingdom.

Because Christ is worthy to open the scroll, God’s plan of redemption—his plan to restore the whole creation continues unabated. No wonder the worship of heaven continued. The songs of redemption are added to the songs of creation sung in chapter four:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and
wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

This song of the heavenly court is echoed by the song sung by all of creation. All creatures in heaven, on earth, and under earth sing:

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor
and glory and power, forever and ever.

We need to worship. We need to sing. We need to express our praises to our Savior.

And to this entire scene, the four living creatures said: Amen. To the answer of who is worthy, to the result of the Lamb taking the scroll, to the whole creation responding in worship, the response is Amen.

That little word that ends our prayers and our sermons. A little word that means, “yes.” This is sure to be. This is true.

We say our “amen” to the Lamb who is worthy. We say our “amen” to the opening of the scroll and the unfolding of God’s plan of redemption. We say our “amen” to this scene of heavenly worship, echoed in our own worship. Amen and amen.