

WORTHY IS THE LAMB!



NONE FOUND WORTHY!

I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;

Revelation 5:1-4

The apostle John sees a throne and One sitting upon the throne with a book in His right hand. Notice how little John says about the One seated. There is a purpose in his silence. How can God be described without somehow diminishing His glory and bring dishonor to His Name? The mind of man cannot comprehend Him and the language of men cannot communicate even the little that men may comprehend.

The things written in these few verses and those that follow seem to indicate that the book or scroll that John sees contained the revelation of God's purpose and plan for all history - past, present, and future. The scroll is written on the inside and out, indicating that it is both voluminous and complete; every detail of history is found in the scroll. It is in God's possession, indicating that He is the author of it. He holds the scroll in His right hand, which throughout Scripture communicates both authority and power. Those things written in the scroll are magnificent certainties of His providence. They will be fulfilled to the letter - every jot and tittle from alpha to omega. The power and wisdom of God is certainly revealed here. Every aspect of human endeavor, from the greatest historical event to the most minute movement of an infant's finger, is foreknown and ordained by God. This in itself is enough to move us to reverence and worship!

John's thoughts are soon interrupted by the loud voice of a strong angel asking a question that would soon bring John to tears, "Who is worthy to open the book?" The voice is great so that it might reach the ears of every created being in heaven, on earth, and under the earth -

"Who is worthy, who is qualified, who is able to make known the purpose and plans of God and to carry them out with absolute perfection?"

The mere fact that the great angel asks the question and yet does not respond to the call demonstrates that not even the mightiest and most holy of God's created beings is worthy to take the task at hand. All history turns upon one single need - redemption; and one single event whereby payment for sin is made and justice is satisfied - the cross. What creature in heaven or on earth is worthy and able to live a perfect life in the flesh of fallen humanity; to take sin

upon himself and yet not sin; to bear the wrath of God and survive; and to make payment for the sins of many with a life of infinite value? The totality of God's creation must bow low and acknowledge that there is no one found in its realm. The greatest angels in heaven declare, "Look not to us!" The most eminent kings, the most consecrated priests, the wisest prophets and sages on earth rend their garments and cry, "Look not to us!" The mighty dead, whose deeds are recorded in the annals of history, cry out from under the earth, "Look not to us!" What creature in heaven, earth, or hell would dare approach the throne of God and take anything from His hand?

On seeing no response from the greatest and most holy of creatures, the apostle John wept greatly. The word translated "weep" comes from the Greek word *klaio* which communicates pain and grief; to weep as one who weeps for the dead. John literally "burst into tears". The scroll held the keys to man's redemption and yet not one among God's creatures is found worthy to open or execute it. Simon Kistemaker writes, "God's curse would continue to rest on sinful humanity, creation would not be set free from the bondage of decay (Romans 8:21), and suffering would last interminably" (NTC, Revelation, p.204). John burst into tears!

THE LAMB IS WORTHY!

And one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals." And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

Revelation 5:5-7

Before the prophet's heart and hope are lost beyond recovery, his weeping is detained by one of the elders who is privy to a knowledge that will soon turn John's sorrow into joy. The elder directs John to turn his eyes toward the Lamb. The elder's command to "Behold" is a wonderful transition and a command to be obeyed by all men in every circumstance. There is no hope to be found in the mightiest and noblest of created beings, but one glance of the Lamb who was slain can restore hope's demolished ruins.

The elder describes the glorified Christ as "the Lion." Jacob referred to Judah as a lion's whelp and prophesied that out of him would come the Messiah to whom the obedience of the nations would be given (Genesis 49:9-10). Albert Barnes writes, "The lion is the king of beasts, the monarch of the forest, and thus becomes the emblem of one of kingly authority and of power" (BN, Revelation, p.123). Such a designation communicates not only authority and power, but ferocity and danger. The Christ of Scripture is not the tame and domesticated Christ of contemporary American Christianity. John makes no attempt to declaw Him.

The second designation used by the elder to describe the glorified Christ is, "Root of David." He is portrayed as a David-like warrior of God who has overcome all obstacles and conquered every enemy. The prophet Isaiah referred to the Messiah as the stem or root of Jesse (11:1, 10) and Jeremiah referred to Him as the righteous branch of David (33:15). Both indicate that the Messiah would

be of David's kingly line. He would be David-like, and yet so much greater than David that David would call Him Lord (Matthew 22:45). Again we see the frailty of humanity, and the greatness of the Christ. David's line was all but lost. It was like a fallen tree with only a lifeless trunk remaining, but the Messiah came forth like a green stem bearing great fruit.

The elder points John to the lionhearted Son of David and declares but one thing, "He has overcome." The God-man Messiah has won the right to take the book from the right hand of God because through the cross, He fought a battle of titanic proportions and came out the Victor. He offered Himself to God as an atoning sacrifice and put away the sins of His people once and for all. In turn, He triumphed over death and the devil who had the power over it (Hebrews 2:14). Charles Spurgeon writes:

"Our champion is worthy. What battles He had fought! What feats of prowess He had performed! He had overthrown sin; He had met face to face the Prince of darkness, and had overcome Him in the wilderness; ay, He had conquered death, had bearded that lion in his den; had entered the dungeon of the sepulchre, and had torn its bars away. Thus He was worthy, in the sense of valor; on returning from the far country to be owned as the Father's glorious Son, heaven's hero, and so to take the book and loose the seals thereof" (MTP, Vol.35, p.388).

The reference to Jesus Christ as "a Lamb standing, as if slain" is powerful. Simon Kistemaker writes, "[It] signifies a body that had been cut to pieces but now was healed and able to stand. The marks of His wounds are still visible, as they were when Thomas was told to look at Jesus' hands and touch the scar in His side" (NTC, Revelation, p.206). The picture is not one of a dying lamb barely able to stand, but of a mighty champion, who, though bearing the terrible scars of battle, stands in the fullness of divine strength.

The Lamb stands in the midst or center of the throne. He bears the marks of a tremendous battle with death, and yet stands triumphant. The threefold use of seven communicates completeness and perfection. The Lamb's seven horns represent His absolute power and sovereignty. All authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). The seven eyes communicate that He sees all and possesses a perfect and immediate knowledge of all things. Nothing escapes Him (I Corinthians 4:5). The seven eyes are identified as the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. Again, the number seven refers to the completeness or fullness of the Spirit. The Lamb is present in body on the throne of God. He has sent the Spirit (in all His fullness) to the very ends of the earth to observe all things and operate in all things according to His will. This same Spirit has been sent by the Lamb to gather a people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and to empower them to serve Him.

THE WORSHIP OF THE LAMB

When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to

take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Revelation 5:8-14

What the mightiest creature in heaven and on earth would not dare attempt, the Lamb accomplishes. He not only takes the scroll, but God gives it. God the Father entrusts the entire course of history to the Son, the great Messiah, our Savior.

The Lamb's taking of the book is immediately followed by an eruption of worship. It comes from four sources which run together and form one mighty river of praise - the four living creatures, the elders, the angels, and the rest of creation. The four living creatures are mighty and mysterious angelic creatures whose close proximity to the throne communicates both their holiness and their power. The elders most likely represent, or are actual representatives of the redeemed. In 4:4, the elders are described as "clothed in white garments, and [having] golden crowns on their heads." In 3:5, white garments are promised to believers who overcome, and in 7:14 these garment are made white in the blood of the Lamb. The elders wear golden crowns on their heads as a sign of their authority. Such crowns and authority are promised to believers throughout the book of Revelation (3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5), but are never promised to angels. The angels, who also render worship to the Lamb, were created to minister to God (Psalm 104:4; Hebrews 1:7) and to serve His people (Hebrews 1:7, 14). They are willing and joyful spectators of the grace given to the redeemed (I Peter 1:12). They worship the Lamb for the great things He has done for men. The final group mentioned includes the rest of creation. No creature is left out of this chorus of praise directed toward the Lamb. It seems best not to limit this group to only intelligent creatures. Since all creation has been subjected to futility as a result of the fall, and all creation is awaiting its liberation (Romans 8:19-22), it seems logical that "every created thing" refers to the whole of creation - animate and inanimate, intelligent and instinctive. Every created thing in heaven, on the earth, and under the earth will somehow serve to worship the Lamb - the birds of the air, the beast of the field, and the monsters of the deep will break forth in worship. One cannot help but think of the many passages in the Old Testament Scriptures that speak of God receiving praise from all things - stars, trees, mountains, animals, etc.

The worship given to the Lamb is described as a "new song," and, therefore, it could not have been sung until He had finished His redemptive work. According to this song, the Lamb is worthy to

take the scroll because He was slain and purchased men for God with His blood. Albert Barnes writes,

“By His coming and death He had acquired a right to approach where no other one could approach, and to do what no other one could do” (BN, Revelation, p.127).

Although the Lamb is worthy on all accounts and for an infinite number of reasons, it is His being slain for the redemption of His people that here constitutes Him being worthy to take the scroll from the very hand of God.

Before we advance, it is important to note to whom payment was made that men might be purchased for God. There are those who erroneously believe that Christ gave His life as a ransom to Satan who held God’s people captive; such a thought is not only unbiblical, but also borders on blasphemy. The Scriptures clearly teach that Christ gave His life to pay the penalty for His people’s sin and to satisfy the justice of God. It is primarily from the just condemnation of the Law that God’s people have been redeemed. The result of that redemption is liberation from the power of the devil.

The greatest problem in all of Scripture is how can a just God forgive sinful men, or “how can God be both just and the justifier of the wicked?” God cannot act in a way that contradicts who He is. He must act in a way that is consistent with all His attributes. As the just “Judge of all the earth,” He must act according to the strictest rules of justice. He must acquit the innocent and condemn the guilty. If He simply pardons the guilty and does not punish every infraction of the Law and every act of disobedience, then He Himself is no longer just or good. How, therefore, can God be just and at the same time, show mercy to those worthy of condemnation? The only way was for Christ to offer Himself as a *propitiation* for the sins of His people, a sacrifice that would put away sin, satisfy divine justice, appease the wrath of God, and open the way for divine mercy to be shown to the guilty.

The logic behind the suffering and death of the Lamb is evident: Man has sinned and the wages of sin is death. God is just and therefore the demands of His Law must be satisfied before the guilty can be pardoned. The people of God are saved because the Lamb bore the guilt of their sin and was crushed under the wrath of divine judgment. He hung in their place, carried their sin, and suffered divine wrath against it. The benefits received from the Lamb’s redeeming work are outlined in verse 10:

“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

There are three specific privileges described in this phrase: First, the redeemed have been made citizens of Christ’s Kingdom. If the character of a kingdom is determined by the character of its king, it is an indescribable privilege to simply be allowed to dwell within the realm of Emmanuel’s land. Secondly, the redeemed have been made priests and have been granted the exceedingly great

privilege of ministering before God and in His name. Thirdly, the redeemed have been granted authority to reign as kings upon the earth. The meek shall not only inherit the earth, but they shall also rule over it. Matthew Henry writes,

“Every ransomed slave is not immediately preferred to honor; he thinks it a great favor to be restored to liberty. But when the elect of God were made slaves by sin and Satan, in every nation of the world, Christ not only purchased their liberty for them, but the highest honor and preferment” (MHC, Vol.6, p.1142).

Around the throne, the four living beings, and the elders are seen what John describes as myriads of myriads of angels or “ten thousands of ten thousands.” John is not attempting to give us an exact number, but rather he is seeking to describe a vast multitude of

celestial creatures that cannot possibly be counted except by the One who created them. This heavenly choir is as innumerable as the stars of the heavens. It was created to bless the Lamb and declare His worth:

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

Though the angels have no need of redemption, it does not mean that they are disinterested. They long to look into the things God has done for His redeemed people and worship Him for them (I Peter 1:12). They are intensely interested in the redemption of God’s people, for by it they are brought to a greater understanding of God, His mercy, and His grace (Ephesians 2:7; 3:10). We must always keep in mind that the suffering of the Lamb is not only

the means by which sinful men are redeemed, but it is also the greatest revelation of God to His creation.

The angels declare in their worship of the Lamb that He is worthy to receive “power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” This majestic statement should be understood in this way: The Lamb is worthy of every title of authority, honor, and blessing that has been and will be conferred upon Him by the Father. There have been many down through the ages who have scoffed at the Lamb, refused to give Him glory, and even vainly designed to take His glory from Him, but the redeemed are elated at the exaltation of the Lamb.

Following the songs sung by the four living beings, the elders, and innumerable angels, another song is heard. It springs forth from every other creature in heaven, on earth, and even under the earth. Simon Kistemaker writes,

“All intelligent beings in God’s created universe sing His praises: the saints and angels in heaven, the birds in the sky, God’s people on earth, and all living beings on land and in the sea. The overwhelming chorus of all these voices, in praise to God and to the Lamb, defies human imagination. God is the king of



creation who delegated the work of creation and redemption to His Son. As God receives tribute from His creatures, so does the Lamb, for He has completed the tasks that God assigned to Him" (NTC, Revelation, p.212).

The worship ends with a blessing pronounced upon Him who sits on the throne and the Lamb:

"To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."

This blessing demonstrates that the Son's work of redemption was in perfect harmony with the Father from the very beginning. For God so loved that He sent, and the Son so loved that He obeyed. The redemption of God's people is an exquisite work of deity for which the redeemed prostrate themselves, the angels shout, all creation sings, and the four living creatures give their absolute affirmation, "Amen!" All heaven cries forth, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory" (Psalm 115:1).

THE LAMB'S REWARD

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Revelation 7:9-14

Who is this multitude that worships God and the Lamb? They are the full number of the redeemed taken from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue. They are all the followers of Christ down through the ages and until the end of the world who have suffered the tribulation and trials of this fallen world. Albert Barnes writes:

"The eye is directed to an innumerable host, gathered from all ages, all times, and all people, triumphant in glory... [It is] the whole assembled host of the redeemed in heaven, gathered there as victors, with palm-branches, the symbols of triumph, in their hands. The object of the vision is to cheer those who are desponding in times of religious declension and in seasons of persecution, and when the number of true Christians seems to be small, with the assurance that an immense

host shall be redeemed from our world, and be gathered triumphant before the throne" (BN, Revelation, p.182).

Their number is beyond a man's power of computation, and yet God and the Lamb knows each one by name. This is a picture of that great day for which every Christian longs. A day when every one of the redeemed will stand before God and the Lamb and offer a perfect sacrifice of praise. This is the Lamb's full reward.

In Psalm 2:8, God promised to give the nations to the Messiah as an inheritance:

"Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession."

In Revelation 7:9, the promise is fulfilled. The obedience of the nations is now given to Lamb. All the saints throughout history and from every part of the world sing in one accord. The curse of Babel has been reversed, and the nations cry out with one voice in perfect harmony.

"Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

The saints are dressed in robes that have been made white in the blood of the Lamb. They are not here pleading for their own salvation or that God Himself might always be secure on the throne, but rather they are ascribing salvation to God as His exclusive work. As the prophet Jonah declared, "Salvation is of the Lord!" (Jonah 2:9). Again, Albert Barnes writes:

"This will undoubtedly be the song of the released for ever, and all who reach the heavenly world will feel that they owe their deliverance from eternal death, and their admission to glory, wholly to Him... The fair meaning is, that whatever is included in the word salvation will be due to God alone—the deliverance from sin, danger, and death; the triumph over every foe; the resurrection from the grave; the rescue from eternal burnings; the admission to a holy heaven—victory in all that that word implies will be due to God" (BN, Revelation, p.184).

These passages of Scripture that we have considered in this article depict that which is the great hope and longing of all who have ever looked upon the fields white unto harvest. The laborers are few and scattered, and the work seems to move at an intolerably slow pace. Nevertheless, we have the great assurance from God's Word that a multitude that cannot be counted will be gathered in and that the Lamb who was slain will have the full reward of His suffering.

May God grant both you and me the grace to give ourselves to this greatest of all endeavors -

WORTHY IS THE LAMB!

