

# The Lamb Is Worthy

Devotional Reading: Psalm 118:15-29

Background Scripture: Revelation 5

Today's Scripture: Revelation 5:1-10

## I. Who Is Worthy?

### Revelation 5:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" <sup>3</sup> But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. <sup>4</sup> I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

1. A *scroll* is typically made from flattened papyrus or animal skins and is opened and closed by being unrolled and rolled.

The description of the document as having *writing on both sides* witnesses to its unusual nature. Most scrolls were written on only one side, but lengthy documents could take up both sides. The fact that this scroll has writing on it front and back signals its contents' breadth, depth, or both.

2. The dramatic action in the rest of this scene is set up by this proclamation of a *mighty angel*, who is unnamed. The use of the word *worthy* makes his question not so much an open invitation as it is a rhetorical challenge. The term *worthy* in this context encompasses not just

moral excellence but also signifies someone who possesses the authority and power to break the seals.

3. The search for someone worthy seems at first to fail. The mention of *heaven, earth, and under the earth* was a typical method of depicting the domains of heavenly beings, earthly beings, and the world of the deceased. But to focus on the scientific nature of each of the three locations is to miss the bigger picture. That bigger picture is "anywhere you can think of." This description, therefore, highlights the entirety of the cosmos, as it does in Philippians 2:10. Every part of creation has been explored, and no one qualified has been found—yet.

4. People are described as weeping in many places in the Bible. But *wept and wept* is an intense form of grief. The ancient Greek words translated as such are found elsewhere in the New Testament only at Matthew 2:18; Mark 5:38; and Philippians 3:18. The sense can be one of the duration of the weeping or depth of distress or both.

One theory that might explain John's reaction concerns what he was told at the beginning of the throne-room scene. There, he was told that future events would be revealed to him (Revelation 4:1). But now, in the verse before us, John's expectations become frustrated. If

John connects the scroll's contents with knowledge of future events and no one can open the scroll, then the promise will not be fulfilled. Even he, John, was not *worthy to open the scroll or look inside*. John's weeping is consistent with what he knows and doesn't know. But that is about to change.

## **II. Christ Is Worthy**

### **Revelation 5:5-10**

<sup>5</sup> Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

<sup>6</sup> Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup> And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased  
for God  
persons from every tribe and  
language and people and  
nation.

<sup>10</sup> You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth."

5. John is comforted by *one of the 24*

*elders* present around God's throne (Revelation 4:4, 10). Someone is indeed worthy, the elder claims, and he refers to this person with two important designations.

The first designation, *the Lion of the tribe of Judah*, comes from Genesis 49:9-10, where Jacob refers to his son Judah as a "lion's cub" and compares him to a lion that no one dares rouse. This metaphor is immediately followed by the promise that Judah will always have the right of rulership.

The other designation, *the Root of David*, confirms that the Messiah is in view. This description comes from Isaiah 11:1, 10, another text viewed as a prophecy about the coming Messiah. The specific title in Isaiah 11:10 is "the Root of Jesse" (Jesse having been the father of David). Isaiah prophesied how the Messiah will bring justice and peace to the earth and unity to the nations. The designation "the Root and the Offspring of David" is explicitly claimed by Jesus near the book's end (Revelation 22:16).

6a. The reader first encounters *the four living creatures* and *the elders* in Revelation 4:4-6. The word *creatures* implies that these beings are neither humans nor angels. In the book of Revelation, the number "four" is symbolic of the entirety of the earth and its inhabitants. Combining that observation with the creatures' multitudes of eyes (4:8) indicates that they are watching the entire earth; nothing is hidden from them. This symbolizes the all-knowing nature of the Lord, his omniscience.

6b. The description of the Lamb combines the number *seven* (symbolizing perfection or completeness) with *horns* and *eyes* (symbolizing divine knowledge per 2 Chronicles 16:9; Zechariah 4:10). The exact meaning of the *seven spirits of God* is difficult to determine. One viewpoint is to take this phrase to be the

same as the sevenfold Spirit depicted in Isaiah 11:2-3; this viewpoint allows a reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

7. The Lamb demonstrates his worthiness by receiving the scroll *from the right hand of him who sat on the throne*. All present, including John, undoubtedly watch in amazement as the Lamb does this audacious thing! However, this is not an act of thievery or usurpation, for God has been waiting for the Lamb. The scroll and its contents belong to the Lamb.

8a. With the transfer of the scroll, worship in Heaven resumes. But now *the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders* bow *before the Lamb*. This is not to recognize a transfer of power that diminishes the authority of the one on the throne. Rather, it recognizes the Lamb's authority and his unity with the one on the throne.

8b. Following the transfer of the scroll, new details unfold before John's eyes. The elders each now have *a harp*, which they presumably use for worship music, given that harps were common as instruments of worship (Psalms 33:2; 71:22; 147:7; etc.). Harps are also mentioned in Revelation 14:2; 15:2.

9a. Worship of the Lamb includes singing. What the elders sing is not an old favorite but *a new song*. This imperative is stressed throughout the Psalter (Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). Revelation 14:3 is an additional implementation. However, in that instance, it's the 144,000 redeemed who are singing while the four beasts and the elders (apparently) listen.

9b. The reality that the Lamb had been slain would have been perceived as a source of embarrassment by many. But the heavenly court praises the Lamb not in spite of his death but because of it. Christ's obedient death is humani-

ty's victory over sin-guilt (Romans 3:25-26). The Lamb's unique obedience to the Father made him worthy to take the book and *open its seals*.

9c. The song now recognizes the diverse nature of those who have been redeemed. The diversity is fourfold in that they come from every family group (*tribe*), every *language* group, every demographic (*people*), and every ethnic group (*nation*). This heavenly mix is drawn from the entire world.

10a. This half-verse yields three minor problems regarding the original author's words per the various Greek manuscripts. The first concerns the word *them*. In some manuscripts, it's the Greek word translated "us" instead. This may have been a scribe's intent to match that word to the diverse group in Revelation 5:9c.

The second minor challenge is that the phrase *our God* appears in only some manuscripts. The third challenge is that some manuscripts have the Greek word for *kings* instead of *kingdom*. Revelation 1:6 also has "kings" instead of "kingdom" in a manuscript variant, so that's evidence for the word *kings*.

However, Exodus 19:6 speaks of "a kingdom of priests," which seems to be the antecedent or pattern for the issue. In any case, we will be treated like royalty when God's kingdom is manifested in its fullest; note the golden crowns the elders wear in Revelation 4:4! Offering certain parallels and directions to the half-verse before us are Isaiah 61:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; and Revelation 20:6.

10b. To serve as a royal priesthood comes with a promise: God's people will one day *reign on the earth*. Christ made this promise explicitly in the letter to the church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:21), and it appears elsewhere in the New Testament as well (2 Timothy 2:12). This is an astonishing and humbling responsibility.

# Involvement Learning

## The Lamb Is Worthy

### Into the Lesson

Which of the three "Life is like . . ." completions most closely matches your experiences?

*Life is like . . .*

- *riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.*
- *a game of chess. Always think before you make a move.*
- *a cactus. It's beautiful but thorny.*

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### Into the Word

As we come to each of the following words or phrases in Revelation 5:1-10, write the Scripture reference where the word occurs in that text and in Revelation 4.

*throne*

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*seven*

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*elders*

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*living creatures*

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*worthy*

Write down Scripture references under the appropriate header as you read through Revelation 5:1-10.

*New to Me*

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*Comforting to Me*

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*Disturbing to Me*

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### Key Verse

They sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation."

—Revelation 5:9

### Into Life

In the spirit of the "new song" of Revelation 5:9, write a couple of lines of lyrics of a new song of praise.

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### Thought to Remember

Jesus alone is worthy of all honor and praise.