

The Lamb who is Worthy

Revelation 5:1-14

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



As we journey through the book of Revelation, we are going to increasingly come to some images and expressions that will be hard for us to understand. That is simply the nature of apocalyptic literature. It makes use of images and symbols that can be easily understood, some are explained in the text, and some are just plain confusing. We shouldn't get thrown for a loop for the parts that just remain a mystery. Instead, we are to keep our eyes fixed on what this particular genre is trying to do. That is, it seeks to give a heavenly explanation of an earthly situation. We are actually not all that unfamiliar with this type of perspective. The Marvel Cinematic Universe, with all of its movies, Avengers, Iron Man, Captain Marvel, Black Panther, and so on, seeks to do the exact same thing. They play on the same themes that we see in Revelation. Let me explain.

In the opening scene of the movie, "End Game," we are confronted with a cosmic problem. Hawkeye (the bow and arrow avenger) is with his family, he looks away for a moment, and when he looks back, they have all disappeared. Now, if you have seen the previous movie, "Infinity War," you know why this is happening to Hawkeye's family. In fact, it has happened all over the known world. Humanity has once again experienced injustice on a cosmic scale, this time at the hands of Thanos. The question that hangs in the balance is, is there anyone who is capable and worthy of holding that evil accountable? This isn't a new theme. Just think of King Arthur's sword¹ – he was the rightful king, and he was worthy. Or even older, Alexander the Great untying the Gordian Knot.² Again, who is worthy to rule and hold evil accountable?

Revelation answers the same cosmic problem that we know exists, and it answers the question of the one who is worthy. However, our movies and legends focus on strength and might, typical power symbols of any age. Revelation points us in a different direction, and as we read, we find that **we have hope because the Lamb has victory.**

¹ The original legend dates back to 1135 AD.

² This dates back to 333 BC.

1. A cosmic problem. (vv. 1-5)

- a. How do we hold chapters 4 & 5 together? → The Creator & Redeemer
 - i. **Chapter 4 recorded a vision of God the Creator.** Now comes **a vision of God the Redeemer, the Lamb who has conquered through his death.** The last chapter ended with the worship of the Creator and this will end with the worship of the Redeemer. These two chapters are very important for an understanding of the message of the book.³
 - ii. Again, it has been said that chapter 5 is the key to the whole book. → Why? Because of this vision of the redeemer and the recalibration of humanity's inability.
 - 1. This is an important passage for us to see Jesus and ourselves clearly.
 - a. He is the one who is able to deliver justice and redemption.
 - b. We are the one's who desire justice and redemption, but our best efforts are always slightly off or don't hit the mark completely.
- b. John is confronted with a cosmic problem of injustice. → I.e., There is no one who is able to make it right.
 - i. There are mysteries in life. **We feel ourselves caught up in the world's evil and misery, and we cannot break free.** Some of us become rigid determinists, and we all, at times, feel a sense of hopelessness and helplessness in the grip of forces stronger than we. **The world's agony is real. And the world's inability to break free from the consequences of its guilt is real.**
 - ii. **This chapter with its seals that no one can break, stresses human inability.** But it does not stop there. More important is the fact that through the Lamb the victory is won. The seals are opened and **God's purpose is worked out.**⁴
 - 1. This is the truth of a complex reality that we all have to work through. → We are wired for justice and we want to see wrong actions made right. But, while we might be able to see those wrongs worked out more completely in our direct spheres, the larger more complex problems, continue to elude our very best efforts.
 - iii. If we aren't able to deliver fully on justice and righteousness, what are we to do? Three possible options.
 - 1. **Fatalists** – We can't deliver and we won't deliver, so we need to just wait on God to deliver justice.
 - 2. **Pragmatists** – Yes, I know that our efforts aren't or won't be perfect, but we have to do something.
 - 3. **Utopians** – We are called and we are capable of delivering heaven on earth here and now.
 - a. We have to come to terms with which of these positions is our natural inclination. We all have one. Then we have to hold that position in tension with what the Bible teaches.
 - iv. **The Bible actually explains the reality of the cosmic problem of evil in terms that we experience and can help to set up healthy expectations.**

³ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 94.

⁴ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 94.

1. Chapters 2-3 were a call to faithful action and living on the part of Christians. → There is an ethical component that is worked out in and through their living.
 2. Chapters 2-3 also show us that as much as we might desire or aspire to see heaven on earth, it will not be experienced in the fullest sense.
 3. Why is that? → The seven seals protect the contents of God's scroll, but **they also indicate that God has willed things that have not been fully carried out. The heavens may resound with choruses of praise to God, but Revelation 2–3 indicated that this was not true on Earth. How will God's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10)?**⁵
 4. Again, Revelation itself challenges our three natural inclinations.
 - a. **Fatalism** – The Bible says you are called to live as righteous people, and that means action.
 - b. **Pragmatists** – Yes, we are to do something, but we must be careful to not excuse unrighteousness / sin just merely in the name of good effort.
 - c. **Utopians** – We will experience a foretaste of the heavenly life to come, but that is what it will be, a foretaste.
 5. Thinker and theologian John Mark Comer asks the question of our ability this way, **"Why can't we seem to fix the world's deepest problems, even with all of our money and technology and political prowess? ... Could it be our souls are at war with another world?"**⁶
 - a. How does Revelation 2-5 answer this? With a resounding, yes, our souls are at war with another world! And the only one who can deliver final and complete justice is the Lamb!
- c. This is a significant drama that has real implications for our lives.**
- i. This is something I love about the Bible. – It pulls the curtain back for us so that we can get clarity on the reality that we are walking through. I.e., It helps us to see the forest through the trees.
 1. We are so predisposed right now in our cultural moment is to ask, what is most loving for me to do right now? → This is called situational ethics.
 - a. The greatest issue or problem with situational ethics is that it focuses on the now, and what can seem loving now, is actually crushingly harmful in the long run. I.e., It misses the forest for the trees.
 - ii. Here in this passage, we see the tension we all feel, and should feel. → If you ever get to a place where you are indifferent or complacent to the injustices of this world, that is something to be checked and explored.
 1. **John's response helps us to understand what was at stake** - So John "wept and wept" (v 4). So much is lost. He has seen the glory of God in heaven and God holds out his purposes for history, ready to go, as it were. But no one is able to unfold God's purposes in history. **History, it seems, is left to spin out of control. The harmony of creation in chapter 4 is left behind to be replaced by the chaos of history. John sees the mess of the world and there is no one to sort it out.**⁷

⁵ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 80–81.

⁶ John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*. (Waterbrook, 2021), from the preface titled, "A manifesto for exile."

⁷ Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (p. 55). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

2. The implication of both proclamations in their contexts is that **no created being, only God**, possesses the worthiness and authority to be sovereign over history and to be able to execute his cosmic plan.⁸
 - a. **No one... could (*oudeis edynato*) signifies complete impotence.**⁹
- iii. So, the Bible acknowledges and helps us to understand what we're experiencing. It also helps to set appropriate expectations for the here and now. While it does those things, it does so with compassion.
 1. Maybe you're weeping. Your heart is broken. The pressure or the loss is overwhelming. **We've got to read the "Weep no more" with the "Behold". This is not a call to get a grip and pull yourself together.** John is not telling you off if you cry into your pillow tonight. He's inviting you to "behold"—to see the Lamb on the throne. He's inviting you to look at the great power in the universe, the One who reigns over history, and see the One who loved you and gave himself for you. And **he invites you to see in the enthronement of the Lamb that your story is not yet over. There's another chapter, and that chapter is glory.**¹⁰
 2. The Lamb is worthy, and the Lamb will have a final victory.

2. The Lamb is worthy. (vv. 5b-9a, 11-14)

- a. His worthiness is in alignment with his victory. → His victory is a historically present reality.
 - i. i.e., It is something that has happened, is happening, and will happen.
 1. Again, as we said last week, only God can speak of things in all three tenses (past – has happened, present – is happening, and future – will surely happen).
- b. The picture of the Lamb is not something for us to miss.
 - i. **When earth-bound men want symbols of power, they conjure up mighty beasts and birds of prey.** Russia elevates the bear, Britain the lion, France the tiger, the United States the spread eagle—all of them ravenous.¹¹
 1. Again, think of a mascot for any sports team, we don't choose impotent images.
 - a. Ames – Little Cyclones / Gilbert – Tigers / Nevada – Cubs / Boone – Treadors
 - b. ISU – Cyclones / Iowa – Hawkeyes / UNI – Panthers
 2. No one is out here choosing mascots that lacks authority, power, or prominence.
 - ii. **When John looks for a lion, he sees a lamb.** → This is the definition of power in the Kingdom.
 1. **It is only the Kingdom of Heaven that would dare to use as its symbol of might, not the Lion for which John was looking but the helpless Lamb, and at that, a slain lamb.**¹²
 2. **The Lion of the tribe of Judah is an expression that occurs here only in the Bible.** Judah is called 'a lion's cub' (Gen. 49:9), and scions of the royal house of

⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 338.

⁹ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 96.

¹⁰ Chester, Tim. *Revelation For You: Seeing history from heaven's perspective* (p. 58). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 97–98.

¹² Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 97–98.

Judah are referred to in one passage in this way (Ezek. 19:2, 3, 5, 6). But little use is made of the concept. Indeed the lion is Israel as a whole (Num. 23:24; 24:9), or even the tribe of Gad (Deut. 33:20). It may even be used of the heathen, e.g. Pharaoh (Ezek. 32:2).¹³

- iii. **This helps us to understand all of the “reversals / upside down ideas” that the Bible says is actually the right way of life.**
 - 1. **Life is found through death to self.** – Mark 8:34-35
 - a. **“³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”**
 - 2. **Freedom is found through submission to Jesus** – 1 Pet. 2:16
 - a. **“¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.”**
 - 3. **Power is about serving** – Mark 10:42-45
 - a. **“⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**
- iv. **The Lamb looks slain... but is not! → This Lamb sees all and is able!**
 - 1. The slain Lamb thus represents the image of a conqueror who was mortally wounded while defeating an enemy. Christ’s death, the end-time sacrifice of the messianic Lamb, becomes interpreted as a sacrifice that not only redeems but also conquers. The idea of conquering is evoked by Genesis 49, Isaiah 11, and the “horns” of the lamb.¹⁴
 - 2. **That is, Christ as a Lion overcame by being slaughtered as a Lamb**, which is the critical event in ch. 5.¹⁵
 - a. This drives us even more towards the “upside down” claims and ideas of the NT and the Gospels. → It is not just a lamb, it is a lamb who visibly has been slain, yet is not dead, instead is conquering.
- v. The Lamb **had seven horns**. In the Old Testament the horn is frequently used as a symbol of strength (e.g. Deut. 33:17). Seven is the number of perfection, so the seven horns indicate the perfect might of the Lamb.¹⁶
- vi. The **seven eyes** on this view denote perfection of seeing. Nothing escapes him. What John appears to be telling us in his different symbols is that Christ, of the tribe of Judah and the line of David, is supremely powerful and all-knowing, and that he has won his

¹³ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 97.

¹⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 351.

¹⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 352.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 98.

victory by his atoning and sacrificial death. There is a striking combination of the utmost in power and the utmost in self-giving.¹⁷

1. We must not rush past these images or this vision for those that are to come in the chapters ahead. Why? Because we are again greeted with a vision of the one who offers us hope. And this hope is not temporary or fleeting, it is cosmic in the most full sense of the word. It is a hope for all and a hope that transcends all other options for hope.

3. Cosmic hope (vv. 9b-10)

- a. What is hope? → A confidence that it is all going to be ok.
 - i. cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-5 – “**3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**”
 - ii. A biblical term (Greek *elpis*) referring to the expectation of the believer that God will fulfill promises made in the past. **Biblical hope is more than a simple wish; it entails certainty based on God’s demonstration of faithfulness to people in the history of salvation as recorded in the Scriptures and as experienced by the church.** Ultimately the Christian’s future hope lies in the promise of Christ’s return and the anticipation of resurrection from the dead.¹⁸
 - iii. **What is cosmic hope?**
 1. If in this passage we experience the weight of the cosmic problem, that is the problem of evil and sin that impacts not only this world but the spiritual realm as well, we also see the offering of cosmic hope. That is, a hope that both meets and transcends our physical reality.
 - iv. What hope do we have? → v. 9b-10
 1. Those who are redeemed are made into a kingdom and priests.
 - a. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9 – “**9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**”
 2. The universal scope of redemption is brought out by piling up expressions to show that the redeemed come from no restricted group but from all over the world. **John is fond of linking every tribe and language and people and nation (see 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; cf. 10:11; 17:15).** An interesting point of style is that John’s word order is not the same in any two examples. The expression resembles the ‘peoples, nations and men of every language’ (Dan. 3:4, 7, 29; etc.), and indeed some think that John is quoting Daniel.¹⁹

¹⁷ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 98.

¹⁸ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 61.

¹⁹ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 100.

- b. **How do we have hope?** → Our hope is not in our circumstances or abilities, but in the one who offers us victory.
- i. The new song sang by the elders and four living creatures - Vv 9b–10 express the content of the “new song.” In the OT a “new song” **is always an expression of praise for God’s victory over the enemy**, sometimes including thanksgiving for God’s work of creation.²⁰
 1. The word *ōdē* is ‘the general word for a song, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, whether of praise or on any other subject’. In the New Testament, however, it is always used of sacred song. This “new” sacred song is not merely referencing the time of its signing, but the deeper reality that it is reflective of. **It is concerned with quality rather than date.**²¹
 - ii. The praise of every creature – v.13
 1. Now the whole creation joins in the song. *Every creature* is explicit enough, but John spells it out by mentioning specifically heaven, earth, the subterranean regions and the sea. *All that is in them* is redundant, but it serves to emphasize that all are included in the mighty chorus of praise. John’s vision is not concerned with an obscure being of no great importance. **In the last resort there is no creature, wherever found, which does not recognize the superior worth of the Lamb.**²²
- c. We are still forced to ask: What are our options for hope?
- i. **Myself** – “Only I can save myself.”
 1. Is this really a sure thing?
 - ii. **Someone / something else** – “I cannot save myself.”
 1. Who really can I hope in?
- d. What does it mean to live as a person with a living hope? (1 Pet. 2:12)
- i. 1 Pet 2:12 – “¹²**Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.**”
 1. **Resiliency** – Holding fast (i.e., conquering) just as the seven churches were encouraged to keep going.
 - a. i.e., We don’t give up on cross-bearing and being salt and light.
 2. **Faithfulness** – Forward-facing trust in God.
 - a. i.e., We don’t place our trust in anything else to be our ultimate hope.
 3. **Declaration** – Proclaiming the good news of the gospel as the most important message we can share and the greatest hope we could offer.
 - a. i.e., We don’t shrink from thoughtfully giving a defense of the hope that resides within.

²⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 358.

²¹ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 99–100.

²² Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 102.

Additional notes:

On the scrolls: The book surely is that which contains the world's destiny, and its contents are revealed to us pictorially as the seals are broken. The book was *sealed with seven seals*. Ladd and others hold that all seven seals were on the outer edge so that no part was opened till all the seals were broken, but this is hard to square with what happened as successive seals were broken (ch. 6). Rather each part of the scroll was kept in place with an individual seal, so that it could be opened one section at a time.²³

- *A book containing God's plan of judgment and redemption.* The "book" is best understood as containing God's plan of judgment and redemption, which has been set in motion by Christ's death and resurrection but has yet to be completed. The question asked by the angelic spokesman concerns who in the created order has sovereign authority over this plan. That the book represents authority in executing the divine plan of judgment and redemption is clear from the parallelism of the hymns in 5:9–10 and 5:12. The former interprets Christ's worthiness to receive the book as indicating his authority to redeem his people and establish them as kings and priests. The latter hymn interprets the Lamb's reception of "the book," mentioned in vv 9–10, more generally as his reception of "power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."²⁴
- The "book" in ch. 5 should be understood as a covenantal promise of an inheritance when seen in the light of the above two identifications of the "book" and of the broader theological context of the Apocalypse concerning paradise lost and regained (cf. 2:7; 3:12; 22:1–5; see also on 12:14–17; 13:3). God promised to Adam that he would reign over the earth. Although Adam forfeited this promise, Christ, the last Adam, was to inherit it. A human person had to open the book because the promise was made to humanity. But no person was found worthy to open it because all are sinners and stand under the judgment contained in the book (5:3). Nevertheless, Christ was found worthy because he suffered the final judgment as an innocent sacrificial victim on behalf of his people, whom he represented and consequently redeemed (5:9). No doubt he was also considered worthy because he overcame the final judgment imposed on him by redeeming a people and by being raised from death (cf. 5:5–6). Therefore, Christ was able to inherit the promises of the book (i.e., "open the book"), as do all those who are represented by him (5:10 shows that they also participate in his kingdom and priesthood; cf. 1:5–6).²⁵
- The book surely is that which contains the world's destiny, and its contents are revealed to us pictorially as the seals are broken. The book was *sealed with seven seals*. Ladd and others hold that all seven seals were on the outer edge so that no part was opened till all the seals were broken, but this is hard to square with what happened as successive seals were broken (ch. 6). Rather each part of the scroll was kept in place with an individual seal, so that it could be opened one section at a time.²⁶

²³ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 96.

²⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 340.

²⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 340–341.

²⁶ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 96.

On the usage of imagery: This scene is a good place to ask again why Revelation communicates through word pictures rather than in a more direct way. The Lamb will be the dominant image for Christ throughout the remainder of the book. The image of the Lamb can hardly be said to conceal Christ's identity, as if John had written in a code to keep his message from being understood. The opening lines of the book identified Jesus Christ as the faithful witness, whose blood frees people from their sins and makes of them a kingdom of priests (1:5–6). John could have been as direct here if he had chosen to do so. Rather than concealing meaning, the images reveal meaning by evoking a range of associations in the minds of the readers.²⁷

On the deity of Jesus: The hymns in vv 9–12 emphasize Jesus' deity more than most other passages in the NT, addressing the Lamb in the same way as God is addressed in 4:11 and 5:13, especially in the clause "worthy are you." The simple fact that worship is given to the Lamb in vv 9–13 demonstrates his deity, since John implies elsewhere that worship is due only to God (22:9). The introductory ἄξιός ἐστι λαβεῖν ("worthy are you to receive") of v 9 takes us back to the introductory formula of 4:11a and may contain the same Danielic echoes as were found there.²⁸

²⁷ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 82.

²⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 358.