

## The Lion, the Lamb and the World

### Revelation 5:1-14

Introduction: When I was in graduate school at the University of Texas at Arlington, I encountered a kaleidoscope of worldviews and perspectives on life. There were: 1) persons like myself, Bible believing, evangelical Christians who operated out of a supernatural worldview. 2) There were others who saw themselves as neo-orthodox Christians. They did not believe the Bible is the Word of God but that the Bible can become the Word of God to you in a personal encounter and experience. 3) Others referred to themselves as liberal Christians. They were skeptical, at best, concerning the supernatural parts of the Bible, but they were fond of the moral teachings of the Bible, especially passages like the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). It could be said that they tended toward the view that the Bible contains the Word of God. 4) Still others approached life from a non-Christian perspective altogether. At the University there were Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Jewish persons. 5) There were also agnostics and atheists, and many of my professors fell into this last category.

I remember on one occasion one of my classmates asking an atheist professor a very important question: “What do you believe the future holds for mankind?” He thought for a moment and then his answer was quick, forthright, and surprising. “I’m not very optimistic,” he said. “When I look at history I

discover man has not treated man very well. When I look at the contemporary world I discover not much has changed. I'm not very hopeful about the future.” He then concluded by saying, “I believe the future holds for mankind certain destruction and potential annihilation. I have no reason to be encouraged about the future.” In a related vein, the German liberal Rudolf Bultmann said, “We cannot claim to know the end and goal of history. Therefore, the question of meaning in history has become meaningless.”

If I held to the same worldview as my atheist professor, I would agree with his prediction 100%. If man can hope only in himself, and if man must save himself as both Humanist Manifesto I and II affirm, then I too believe the future holds for humanity certain destruction and potential annihilation. But you see that is where Revelation 5 enters the scene, with a word of hope and certainty. I might summarize the theme of this chapter by the words of a little rhyme I was taught as a small boy in my Baptist Church in Atlanta, GA: “He [speaking of God] has got the whole world in His hands!” This world is not out of control rushing headlong toward destruction and annihilation. All things are under the sovereign and secure control of our great God because...in heaven...there is a Lion, who is also a Lamb, and He has the whole world on His heart and in His hand!

Transition: Revelation 5 teaches us the Lamb of God is a missionary Lamb who is in control and who is supremely worthy. We saw a glorious vision of Him in 1:13-

16. Now, we see a second one that beautifully complements it. The theme of His worthiness is preeminent, and three reasons in particular are noted and developed in this 5<sup>th</sup> chapter. In the Old Testament we see the Lamb on an altar and his blood on the Passover doorpost. In the Gospels, He is on the cross. In the Revelation, He is on the throne (Deane Woods, “The Lamb in the Apocalypse,” *Israel My Glory*, May/June 2005, 27). The Lamb of God is worthy because:

I. Jesus Christ is the Lord of History 5:1-5

Revelation 4-5 is actually one vision of two parts. Chapter 4 focuses on God the Father and Creation. Chapter 5 focuses on God the Son and Redemption (but note the Trinitarianism of 5:6-7). God has the authority and the right to do with this world as he pleases. He created it. He redeemed it. David Levy says, “it [also] provides a fitting introduction to the revelation of God’s program to be unfolded in chapters 6-22” (“The Scrolls with Seven Seals,” *Israel My Glory*, Oct/Nov 1995, 20).

1) He is the Lord because of God’s plan 5:1

- John sees God the Father on His “throne,” a word appearing more than 40 times in Revelation. Some even call it a “throne book.” This is the place of sovereignty and authority. In His “right hand,” the hand of authority, John sees “a scroll with writing on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven

seals.” The scroll is filled to the brim with information and it is perfectly or completely sealed up.<sup>1</sup> The scroll is mentioned 8 times in this chapter.

- Of course the question is, what is the scroll? Many different answers have been given: 1) a title deed to the earth; 2) a last will and testament; 3) Ezekiel’s book of lamentation, mourning and woe (2:9-10); 4) the sealed book of the end time in Daniel 12:4. I am sympathetic to both #3 and #4. However, there may be a much simpler answer: it is the remainder of the book of Revelation (chs. 6-22). Don Carson says it is a book of “blessing and cursing” (audio teaching). I like that but would expand it to 3 categories: it is a book of judgment, salvation and restoration.

- Judgment (seals (6), trumpets (8-9), bowls (15-16), Lake of Fire (20:11-15)).
- Salvation (Jew and Gentile (7, 14, 19:1-10)).
- Restoration (New Heavens, New Earth, New Jerusalem (21-22)).

God has a definite plan for history and its consummation. It is mapped out. It is set. It will not fail. (Johnson has an excellent summary as to various views of the scroll, 74-75).

2) He is Lord because of heaven’s problem 5:2-4

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<sup>1</sup> A scroll with writing on both sides is called an “Opisthograph” (Johnson, *BCS*, 73).

John now sees a 2<sup>nd</sup> thing: “a mighty (strong) angel” who with a “loud voice” (Greek *phoné megale*,” a “mega voice”) “proclaims” (pre. tense): “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” The response of verse three is disheartening to say the least, “But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or”, for that matter, “even to look in it.” John’s response in verse 4 is understandable, “I cried and cried because no one was found worthy...” The word “worthy” is crucial appearing 4 times in our text (2, 4, 9, 12). For a brief moment a survey of heaven reveals no one is worthy to approach God, take the scroll, and usher in the eschaton. Not Abraham or Moses. Not Joshua or Caleb. Not Elijah or Elisha. Not Jeremiah, Ezekiel or Daniel. Not James, Peter or Paul. Not an angel or even an archangel. A universal search is made. No one is worthy. Heaven has a problem.

### 3) He is Lord because of His power 5:5

- An elder, one of the redeemed (4:4) chastens John telling him, “Stop crying” (an imp. with the negative). “Look! (See, behold), the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has been victorious so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals.”

- “The Lion of the tribe of Judah” is a messianic title drawn from Genesis 49:9-10. Messiah will come from Judah and he will be a king. It speaks of authority, power, strength.
- “The Rood of David” is also messianic and draws from Isaiah 11:1, 10 and Jeremiah 23:5. Messiah will be a descendent of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16) and as “the Root,” he is the source and genesis of all the blessings bestowed on God’s people.
- He is “victorious” is the Greek *nike*. It means to conquer (*ESV*), triumph (*NIV*) prevail (*NKJV*) or overcome (*NASB*). Later in 12:11 it will be said of the saints that they “conquered [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb.” This statement prepares us for two of the most awesome verses in all of the Bible.

## II. Jesus Christ is the Lord of victory 5:6-7

When we come to verse 5 we encounter an enigma in the drama of redemption.

We are not prepared for what we see. We have been told to look for the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Root of David. We are looking for a great and mighty King. This, however, is not what we see in the surprising drama of salvation. John is slow and dramatic in his presentation. He builds suspense!

We are not disappointed in what unfolds.

### 1) He is victorious because He was slain 5:6

- I must confess to not being happy with the *HCSB* at this book. It goes against the ordering of the Greek text and misses the anticipation the text wishes to convey. A more literal reading is this: “Then I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures (angelic beings of worship, 4:6-8) and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as having been slain.” Both the Lamb and His death are pushed back for effect and emphasis.
- The word Lamb (Greek *arnion*) is a special word used 29 times in Revelation and only one time outside the book (see John 21:15). Mounce notes it is used exclusively of the resurrected and victorious Christ (Mounce 132; Fn. 18). However, 28 times it refers to Jesus in Revelation. One time it does not and that is in 13:11 where it speaks of the false prophet who “had two horns like a lamb, but he sounded like a dragon” (i.e. Satan). He looks like a friend but his words reveal his true allegiance and character. He is actually God’s and the true Lamb’s enemy.
- The theme of the lamb is a rich one in the grand redemptive storyline of the Bible.
  - Genesis 22:8 (Abraham and Isaac) → “God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.”

- Exodus 12:5 (Passover) “Your lamb shall be without blemish” (*NKJV*).
- Isaiah 53:7 (The suffering servant of the Lord) “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter” (*NKJV*).
- John 1:29 (The declaration of John the Baptist) “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

All of these types, prophecy and proclamation find their fulfillment in the victorious Warrior Lamb (see 1 Enoch 90) the Lord Jesus Christ. “Slain” is in the perfect tense. There is permanence about the marks, the scars, of His sacrifice. There is also a once and for all nature with abiding results to His sacrifice. He was slaughtered as a sacrifice, taking our place and bearing our sin.

2) He is victorious because He is standing 5:6

“Slain” speaks of His death. “Standing” speaks of His resurrection. This word is also in the perfect tense. There is permanence to the resurrection. There was a day when His dead body got up and left the tomb and it will never die again! Jesus of Nazareth began to stand in resurrection life at a point and time in history, He stands today, and He will stand forever.

3) He is victorious because He is strong 5:6

“He had seven horns” will confuse and terrify (especially children!) if we forget this is apocalyptic literature filled with symbols that must be

interpreted symbolically. Seven is the number of perfection. Horns in this context represent power and strength. Put together He has perfect strength, He is all-powerful, He is omnipotent.

4) He is victorious because He is searching 5:6

- He also has “seven eyes.” Eyes represent wisdom and knowledge. Seven again means perfect. In tandem they inform us He has perfect knowledge, He is all-knowing, He is omniscient. And these “are the seven spirits of God sent out in all the earth” (cf. 1:4). Now we know there is only one Holy Spirit of God, but the number seven again speaks of the perfection, completeness and fullness of Spirit (note Isaiah 11:2) that goes out over the whole of the earth. The emphasis is on His omnipresence.
- Taken together, this is nothing less than a full affirmation of the Lamb’s deity, for only God is all-powerful, all-knowing and everywhere present. So, in light of what the Lamb has done (His work of atonement) and in light of who He is (God), He can do in verse seven what no one else in all of creation can do.

5) He is victorious because He is sovereign 5:7

- “He (the Lamb) came and took the scroll out of the right hand of the One (the Father) seated on the throne.” No one else can do this. No one else

ever attempts to do this. John Piper notes, “The Lion gets the victory through the tactics of the Lamb....Because Jesus is a Lion-like Lamb and a Lamb-like Lion, he has the right to bring the world to an end for the glory of his name and the good of his people” (“Christ: The Lion and the Lamb,” 3-23-88).

- One man, reflecting on this truth put it in a familiar hymn like this:

God’s Perfect Lamb

Mary had a little Lamb,  
His soul was white as snow.  
And anywhere His Father sent,  
the Lamb was sure to go.  
He came to earth to die one day,  
the sin of man to atone.  
And now He reigns in heaven alone.  
He’s the Lamb upon the throne!

III. Jesus Christ is the Lord of Glory

5:8-14

The redeeming blood of the Lamb is no embarrassment in heaven. Not only are they not ashamed to talk about it, they love to sing about. Verses 8-14 introduce three beautiful hymns sung in heaven. The first is sung by the saints (8-10), the second is sung by the angels (11-12) and the third is sung by all creation (13-14). The first choir is the smallest, the second larger and the third the largest of all. The first song is the longest, the second shorter and the third the shortest by far. In heaven they sing about Jesus, the Lamb of God. How they sing and what they

sing is inspiring and instructive for our worship when we gather to praise our Savior.

1) He is praised by the saints            5:8-10

Jesus takes the scroll (v. 8) and “all heaven breaks loose!” “The four living creatures and the twenty four elders” fall down in adoration, praise and worship. They have in their possession “harps” the instrument of praise. They have in their possession “golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (cf. 8:3-5). In praise and prayer they bend their knees and put their faces to the “sea of glass, like crystal” (4:6).

Their praise is voiced in a new (Greek *kainen*, new in kind or quality) kind of song, the “Song of Redemption.” The Lamb is declared to be worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals. Why? Four reasons are given: 1) “For you were slain.” 2) “By your blood you ransomed (redeemed, purchased, Greek *agorazo*) people for God.” And from where? The missionary Lamb who is a Lion has ransomed people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (cf. 7:9-17). No one is barred from the Cross. All the barriers have been shattered and destroyed (Eph. 2:11-22). 3) “You have made them (the saints) a kingdom and priest to our God.” As kings we reign with Him, “fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). As priest we serve for Him, “a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus

Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). We “shall reign on the earth” looks to the millennium reign in 20:4-6, and possibly also to the eternal reign in chapters 21-22. It is no wonder He is so loved, adored and praised by the saints.

2) He is praised by the angels 5:11-12

The angelic host will not sit on the sideline and watch this glorious worship. They must get involved too! Suddenly John sees and hears from around the throne, the living creatures and the elders “the voice of many angels.” How many? The text says they numbered lit. “myriads of myriads (*NIV*, “thousands upon thousands”, *HCSB*, “countless thousands”), plus thousands of thousands.” Their number is not what is important. Speculation or the number of angels is wasted time. What they do, however, is worth paying attention to. They praise the Lamb with a magnificent seven-fold (perfection!) blessing. The Lamb who was slaughtered is worthy (cf. v. 9). Worthy for what? To receive 1) power, 2) riches, 3) wisdom, 4) strength, 5) honor, 6) glory and 7) blessing. We nor the angels can give Him the first four things. We can only acknowledge He has them in all their fullness and perfection. However, we can give Him honor (Greek *timen*), glory (Greek *doxan*) and blessing (Greek *eulogia*). The word “blessing” is the Greek word from which we get our word “eulogy.” Etymologically it breaks down to mean “a good word.” In other words as long as we have breath, we can say a

good word about Jesus. We can witness to others about Jesus. We can brag on Jesus. We can take the gospel to the nations for Jesus. We do talk about what we love don't we? Are we talking a lot and saying good gospel things about our Lord and King (19:16)?

3) He is praised by all creation 5:13-14

The redeeming work of the Lamb now draws the praise of all creation. After all, creation itself longs for the day when it “will also be set free from the bondage of corruption” (Rom. 8:21). In a doxological affirmation John hears “every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them.” A.T. Robertson called these “the four great fields of life.” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 6, 336). In words similar to but shorter than the previous hymn, all creation ascribes “Blessing and honor and glory and dominion (*ESV*, “might”) to the One seated on the throne (God the Father) and to the Lamb (God the Son) forever and ever (lit. unto the ages of the ages).” The four living creatures who day and night never stop worshipping (4:8) say, “Amen!” We agree! So be it! “Oh, Yes!” (*The Message*). The elders once more (cf. v. 8) “fell down and worshiped,” and some translations like the *NKJV* add, they “worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.” Not in the best manuscripts, the latter phrase certainly captures the spirit of the vision

we have had the blessing of eavesdropping in on for a few verses. Imagine what it will be like, when we are there!

Conclusion: If we were all gathered together and the governor of the state were to walk in, it would be appropriate for us to stand in honor of his office, whether we agreed with his politics or not. And, if the president were to walk in, it would be right both to stand and applaud, irregardless of his politics. But, if the Lord Jesus, the Lamb who is a Lion, were suddenly to walk in, to stand would be inadequate, and to stand and applaud would almost be arrogant. No, in light of who He is and what He has done, the only rightful response is to do what we see in verse 14, they “fell down and worshipped Him who lives forever and ever.”