

Revelation 5
Who is Worthy?

DUMB SMART QUESTIONS

Have you ever heard of those? It can be a good learning tool when learning a foreign language.

EX: in Paris just a few blocks from Notre Dame....

Here is Revelation 5 we see a REAL QUESTION, not a dumb-smart question. John sees a scroll and he sees a proclamation that is the hinge for the whole book.

Listen for it as we read...

The Book with Seven Seals

1 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. 2 And I **saw** a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"

3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. 4 Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; 5 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."

6 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. 7 And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. 8 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. 9 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.

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

11 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, 12 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."

13 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."

14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Did you hear the question, v. 2?

This morning we'll take the first part of this chapter v. 1-6

What John sees, a sad verse; the Good News, and a BIG SURPRISE.

This scene in Chapter 5 sets up the rest of what unfolds in the book. The opening of the scrolls is the "unveiling", i.e. the apocalypse.

The scene in heaven from chap 4 was NOT uniquely Christian, i.e. it could have been written by a pious Jew, but here in ch 5 we see the unveiling of a VERY Christ centered vision of heaven and salvation.

John SEES something v.1 – a a book / scroll sealed with seven seals

I believe that the best interpretation is that the scroll / book is the record of God's plan for the world. His plan includes judgement and redemption. As it is opened, the scroll will carry us forward and backward in history. In John's vision the breaking of the seals sets the divine will in motion for the accomplishment of His purpose to bring history to its predestined conclusion.

The breaking of the seals introduces a sequence of seven scenes that unfold as the Lamb breaks the seals one by one (Rev. 6:1–8:1). These visions symbolically portray "what must take place after" the current conditions in the seven churches of Asia, which Jesus has addressed in his seven letter-edicts (Rev. 2–3). Primarily, they show a series of distressing but limited disasters that will befall rebellious humanity, as history continues to unfold between Christ's first and second comings to earth. (Johnson)

This means that in order to understand the events going on around us, we must trace their origin back to the sovereignty of God as He rules from His throne in heaven. THAT IS THE MOVEMENT OF FAITH. It is why we grieve, but not as those who have no hope. That is why we can be ready to give an account of the HOPE we have within us. (1 Thess 4; 1 Pet 3:15).

v.2 Then he SEES a proclamation which is a QUESTION, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"

Another way of asking this is, "Who in the created order has sovereign authority over God's plan?" Beale God could break the seals, but in His plan, He requires that it be opened by someone else.

v. 3 is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. We know that because of v.4

v.4 – John begins to weep because until the seals are broken, history cannot come to its consummation that reveals the interests of the kingdom of God.

John is facing a sort of existential "what's it all about?" moment when he sees the scroll that is sealed. If it remains sealed, then we never find out what it's all about.

If no one is worthy to open the scroll ...

then all is lost.

...There will be no redemption.

...There will be no New Heaven and New Earth.

...NO tears be wiped away.

...NOTHING WILL BE MADE NEW.

...The curse from the Garden will never be lifted.

Vern Poythress: (The Returning King p. 166) The destiny of John, of the church, of the universe itself hangs in the balance over the question of whether someone can open the scroll.

John is distraught over the possibility that no one will be able to open the scroll.

John is dealing with the question that we all ask at some time, "What's it all about?"

<https://genius.com/Burt-bacharach-alfie-lyrics>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMRmO9fMXQA>

[final words of the film 2004 version], but the original was 1966. As a pre-teen I was familiar with the phrase, "What's it all about, Alfie?" It was, AND STILL IS, the cry of the human soul.

Alfie spent his life pursuing his own pleasure and gain. He sounds like an echo of Ecclesiastes:

You know what? When I look back on my little life and the birds I've known and think of all the things they've done for me and the little I've done for them, you'd think I've had the best of it along the line. But what have I got out of it? I've got a bob or two, some decent clothes, a car, I've got me health back and I ain't attached. But I ain't got me peace of mind – and if you ain't

got that, you ain't got nothing. I dunno.. **So, what's the answer? That's what I keep asking myself – what's it all about?** Know what I mean?

Because of the popularity of the song, "What's it all about Alfie?" was a sort of meme back before there were memes.

"What's it all about?" **HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THERE?** I certainly have been – freshman year at UGA. Honestly, there are times when the events of my life or this world raise the same question..." What's it all about?" **CHAPTER 5 OF Revelation TELLS US... as...**

v.5 One of the elders brings THE GOOD NEWS – this is what life AND the Bible ARE all about – the Good News of the Lion who has overcome so as to open the scroll and its seven seals. He says, "Stop weeping, **BEHOLD**, i.e **LOOK** and see the Lion from the tribe of Judah".

Good news comes when we get our eyes off ourselves and our current situation and we get a glimpse behind the scenes around the throne of God.

John needed the reminder of this **GOOD NEWS** just as we do today. There are plenty of reasons to weep as we read the headlines of what is happening in the world today.

We live in a man-centered world where we are the center of all things and the spirit of the age says to "look to yourself, find yourself, actualize your inner self." Carl Trueman's book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, explains how we got here. It was a long process of forgetting or ignoring God and exalting self. Its roots go back to the garden of Eden and the fall of mankind.

EX: The rise of the modern self is demonstrated in magazine titles and content: **TIME, LIFE** – broad topics became **PEOPLE**, a much smaller slice of life. Then came **US**, a smaller slice of people. Then came **SELF** (1979) an even smaller slice of us.

We need to **STOP** looking at ourselves AND **BEHOLD** the Living Christ who is enthroned in heaven.

Friends, if you hear nothing else today, hear this...There is one who has overcome, and He has authority to open the scroll and its seals. This one is the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.

The rest of the book of Revelation lays out the final victory of the Messiah and His kingdom. These are the fruit and outworking of the victory won over sin, death, and the Devil at the cross.

The description from John might cause us to imagine a powerful majestic Lion who has put his and our enemies to flight. He is the long-anticipated warrior-king like David who has come to bring deliverance. This powerful Lion is able to open to all men the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

Graeme Goldsworthy's THESIS - The Lamb-Lion tension shows that the gospel is the only key to the understanding of the Book of Revelation.

v. 6 The big surprise –THE MYSTERY OF THE Kingdom IS the Lion WHO is a Lamb who was slain. This is the victory which puts the kingdom in our reach – the Lamb who was slain.

John has his Clark Griswold moment – National Lampoon's Christmas – "Are you surprised Clark?" says Cousin Eddie.

"If I woke up with my head sewn to the carpet, I wouldn't be more surprised than I am right now." Not exactly classic prose, but it gets the point across.

The surprising counter-intuitive apocalyptic truth that is unveiled is this, **THE VICTORY OF God WAS THE HUMILIATION AND DEATH OF HIS SON.** (Goldsworthy)

The Lion assumes the meekness of the Lamb and dies in order to ultimately overcome.

Let that sink in for a moment because it is counter intuitive to our way of thinking. Yet, it is consistent with what we've seen from God throughout the pages of scripture-

- God calls a nobody, Abram, to become the father of a great nation
- His son Isaac is born to a couple too old to bear children
- The younger brother Jacob ends up with the birthright
- The younger brother Joseph goes from a prison cell to the right hand of Pharaoh
- The enslaved people of Israel are set free by a great deliverance and are given the promised land
- The virgin bears a son, Immanuel.
- The first will be last and the last will be first
- Turn the other cheek
- The greatest among you shall be the servant of all.
- Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good
- Do not return insult for insult but give a blessing instead.

These are just some of the upside-down truths of God that point to the ultimate upside-down truth that God's ultimate victory came through the death of his Son, the Lamb.

I don't know a single father or mother that would consider the humiliation and death of a child as a great victory.

This is one reason why I believe that the Bible is truly from God and not men. No one would make this up. It is soooooo different from any other religion or philosophy.

Here in this vision, we see the foundation of the unveiled HOPE – Jesus Christ is the Redeemer. He is the Good News. Revelation, like every book of the bible is a pointer to Christ. Therefore, the opening of this prophetic, apocalyptic, and pastoral letter begins with these words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". Jesus Christ, his life, death, and resurrection is at the center of the kingdom of God and the history of mankind.

At the center of the GOSPEL is the good news that the Lion was slain as a Lamb. John heard the proclamation of the good news. The gospel is news to be proclaimed – that Jesus came to live the life we should have lived, and he died the death we should have died. That is the news to be proclaimed and believed. We only receive the gift of salvation through faith in the work of Christ on our behalf.

In scripture we see Christ as central to the meaning of all of life:

He is the meaning of creation – Col 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Christ is the meaning of the covenants and the law – John 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

Christ is the meaning of prophecy: Speaking of the law and the prophets Jesus said, "I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Matthew 5:17) All the promises of God are 'yes' in Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 1:19-20)

Christ is the meaning of Christian existence "For to me, to live is Christ", said Paul (Philippians 1:21).

Christ is the meaning of the second coming. Christ does not return to do some new work. His return will be to consummate the finished work of His life, death, and resurrection – the display of His power and glory to all principalities and powers and receiving His bride, the church, into His presence for eternity.

Christ is the meaning of our walk of faith.

Our approach to sanctification is to walk by faith in Christ who is unveiled in the book of Revelation.

Goldsworthy...

Faith is never a vaguely defined thing for Paul. It is always defined by its object: Jesus Christ. Faith means implicit trust in the Christ of the gospel to save and sustain us. To live by faith means to live by the gospel.

The Holy Spirit works to energize our faith in Christ alone. He works to remind us in our minds and our hearts of all that God is for us in Christ. ...By faith we know that this Savior is now the Lion who has conquered, the ruling Lord of all creation. But we can know him as the Lion only because of his conquest as the suffering Lamb.

John surprises us with a fresh vision of the glory of God's plan. The truth of salvation should have an impact on our present-day Christian experience. John shows how Jesus saves the ordinary Christian from a trivial view of himself and of his meaning. He enables us to see that the tribulation of the Lamb dignifies the tribulations of every believer with a significance that can never be swallowed up in the chaos and messiness of this life.

At times you may think that your life is mundane, trivial, or even meaningless, but Jesus by his life in the mundane daily reality of this world, dignifies even the routine mundane aspects of life, when we walk through them by faith.

His trials and tribulations as the Lamb dignify the tribulations that we experience when we receive them and walk through them by faith.

Just as God did not waste the tribulation of Jesus, He will not waste our tribulations as we walk with Him by faith.

Salvation does not come by faith in faith, or by faith in our ability to follow Christ, or by our good works, or by believing that He will come again. We are saved by believing that He has come in the flesh as our savior and redeemer. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity.

This good news, or Gospel, is the power of God for salvation, AND it constantly bears fruit in those who believe. (Col 1:5-6). John is given this vision or Revelation from heaven and its focus is the person and work of Christ.

We too often make the mistake of thinking that the gospel is what we need to get converted and then we move on to something deeper. We think we need to do something or have some sort of experience or encounter or act of total surrender or consecration, etc.

We make the mistake of thinking that we are to approach sanctification by some means other than the gospel of Christ. **What God achieved in Christ IS THE GOAL of all His purposes expressed in the OLD AND NEW Testaments.**

All the promises of God are 'yes' in Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 1:19-20)

In the Table, Jesus says, "Yes, come to me to be nourished in your faith."

God has given us THE TABLE to strengthen us in our walk of faith.

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