

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE VICTOR

Worthy to Take the Scroll

Revelation 5

Mark Vroegop

Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each 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 scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped (Rev. 5, ESV).

My first "real job" was a caddy at a golf course. It was a great learning experience for a thirteen-year-old boy. The game of golf has rules like any sport, but there's also a lot of etiquette – where to stand, when to speak, how to give advice. Being a caddy is hard work, and you learn how to navigate different personalities and skills. I carried the bag of some amazing golfers and also some not-so-great golfers. I quietly listened as grown men gossiped, bragged, and ruthlessly teased each other. When you are carrying a bag, you get a chance to see relationships develop and deals get done.

Besides knowing your place and blending into the scenery, the most important (and lucrative) part of being a caddy is finding a lost ball. Watching the flight of a drive and finding the location of the next shot were really important. And I learned an important lesson – one that earned me a lot of gratitude.

Finding a golf ball is much easier when you are on a small hill or if you have some elevation. So, I would often separate myself from the group, find a higher point of view, and it gave me a greater purview of the location of the lost ball. Sometimes, being close to the ball meant that you couldn't see it. But with distance and height, you gain a different perspective.

That's not just true in golf. That's true in life, in your spiritual development, and in the book of Revelation. We're able to gain perspective when we see things from a different vantage point. C.S. Lewis in *The Last Battle* uses "further up, further in" to describe the spiritual journey of those who follow Aslan as they discover their beautiful, final home.

After introducing us to the Revelation of Jesus Christ in chapter 1 and providing instruction through the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, John hears these words in chapter 4: "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this" (Rev. 4:1). It's an invitation to a perspective change, to come "further up and further in," and to understand what's happening behind the scene of history.

John is invited into the throne room of heaven not just for a tour, but for an important lesson. Before he's given the opportunity to see other elements of this revelation, he's given (and so are we) an opportunity to see what is really happening. In chapter 5 we get a glimpse in the throne room again. This time we see **the plan of redemption that leads to worship.**

Now this perspective is much more than mere information. This is meant to encourage John as he faces an uncertain future as an exile. This vision serves to create faithful endurance as we're given a different vantage point. John helps us see what's really going on.

1. Plan (vv. 1-4)

John is brought into the throne room where he encounters a scene related to an important scroll that records the divine plan.

Once again, John leads with what he saw. He's receiving a revelation, and he's attempting to help us understand the vision because there's a message here. John returns to "the one seated on the throne" in 5:1. We learned from chapter 4 that this is a vision of God and his glory. But the focus shifts from the power of everything connected to the throne to the scroll.

In the right hand of the one seated on the throne is a scroll "written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (5:1b). A scroll with seals would have been a familiar image for the Christians reading Revelation. It combines texts in Ezekiel and Daniel.

"But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe (Ezek. 2:8-10).

But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end... (Dan. 12:4a).

This scroll represents more than information or scripture. In historic context, this is the divine plan for the world. That's clearly the implication in the connection with Ezekiel and Daniel. But notice that it's also sealed with seven seals. As we'll see next week, those are connected to judgment. As each seal is opened, there are different judgments that follow.

This scroll is the plan of God, which includes deliverance and judgment. The connection with these two themes is not new. The most important example would be the Exodus with the ten plagues and a Passover lamb that provided protection from the angel of death. Judgment is part of God's plan for deliverance. God delivers through judgment. We'll talk more about this with the verses that follow.

What happens next is stunning. It's designed to be dramatic. There's a message here! According to verse 2, John saw a mighty angel who serves as a herald for the throne room. This is similar to the kind of scene that we find in Daniel 4 with another angel who makes a proclamation of judgment. In Revelation 5, the angel loudly proclaims an important question: "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" (5:2) Do you understand the question? The angel is asking who is qualified to fulfill the divine plan of God. There's a plan in place – for deliverance and judgment – but who will bring it to pass?

You might wonder why doesn't God just open his own scroll? Nancy Guthrie writes:

If God were to open on his own, with no mediator or protector, the scroll that pours out wrath, no one would escape the punishment that will be poured out. Someone must come onto this dramatic heavenly scene to demonstrate the justice of God against evil as well as the sacrifice of God to accomplish salvation.¹

After the question goes forth, there's silence in heaven. According to verse three, there was no one "in heaven, on earth, or under the earth" who is able to open the scroll. Seeing this reality, John begins to weep (v. 4). Why is John broken-hearted? One possibility is that John weeps because he rightly expected Jesus to step forward, and he's undone out of disappointment, confusion, and fear. What if it's all not true? Another possibility is that John weeps because he feels the tension of God's redemptive plan being thwarted. An unopened scroll means no divine justice, no deliverance, no redemption.

Can I encourage you to not merely study and examine this text intellectually? Allow yourself to be brought into its full emotion. If you're a Christian, just think about where your life would be without Jesus. Consider what you'd pursue, where you'd get your identity, and what you'd do with your guilt? Imagine how empty your life would be without a relationship with Jesus. Does that move you to tears? Or, as we heard during REACH, does 1.6 billion unreached people affect you? No wonder John is weeping.

The plan of God is more than just a blueprint for the created order and how things can be better. It's means by which the devil is defeated, sin is forgiven, and people are delivered. The scroll and seven seals are not just a plan. It is *the* plan – a glorious, powerful, sovereign, and gracious plan.

¹ Nancy Guthrie, *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 96.

2. Redemption (vv. 5-7)

The scene in Revelation 5 shifts in verse 5. While John is weeping, one of the twenty-four elders seated around the throne gives John some incredible news. He tells John that he should stop weeping because (behold!) "... the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered so that he can take open the scroll and its seven seals. Once again, we have a statement connected to the Old Testament.

In Genesis 49, the tribe of Judah is described like a fierce lion who will have authority over the world. And in Isaiah 11:10, there was a prophetic promise that the stump of Jesse shall have a "root" that will beckon people to come to God's resting place. This Lion has "conquered," an important word that we heard in the letters to the churches.

The point of this proclamation should be clear enough: John's weeping needs to cease because there actually is someone who can open the scroll because he's the fulfillment of God's promise, and he has conquered. Oh, how this must have made John's heart leap! But the image that follows must have been somewhat surprising.

Do you remember the descriptions of Jesus in chapter 1 and then within each of the letters to the churches? John described him with a long robe, a head full of snow-white hair, eyes blazing with fire, a voice like the roar of many waters, a sword coming out of his mouth, and a face shining like the sun (Rev. 1:12-16). I would guess that John anticipated another image like this, especially with the previous description of a conquering lion. But it's a surprising description.

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. (Rev. 5:6).

In the epicenter of God's throne is a living Lamb with all the marks of being slain. This Lamb has seven horns, which speak to his power, and seven eyes, which speak to his knowledge of everything. Don't miss that the Lion is a Lamb and that the small root is omnipotent and omniscient. Conquering has come through sacrifice.

Once again, we see the way that the plan of God is meant to be shocking and counter intuitive. Commentator Ian Paul summarizes this well:

Here is the one who fulfils the hopes of God's people Israel, as the promised anointed Davidic king who was to come. Here is one who is fierce and powerful enough to conquer their enemies and tear them apart. And yet when John sees him, he is like a weak and vulnerable lamb who has been slaughtered, just like the Passover lamb eaten by the people, the suffering servant who was 'wounded for our transgressions' and the lamb offered as an atoning sacrifice. He is the one who

was slain, but *now* stands, shares the throne with God and with him sends the Spirit to enact his will on earth.²

This is the plan of redemption on full display. At the center of the throne is a Lamb with a gash on its neck who is not laying on the altar but standing in a position of authority. Here is the Passover sacrifice who is the means by which redemption (deliverance and judgment) has come. Here is the Lion of Judah who conquers his enemies and covers his people by sacrifice. This must have been an awe-inspiring moment! But it gets even better.

According to verse 7, the sacrificial Lamb moves toward the throne. The scroll is still in the right hand of “the one seated.” Remember the previous question “Who is worthy to open the scroll.” Well, now it’s clear who is worthy as the Lamb takes the scroll.

This is more than a hand-off. This is more than just an action taken by the Lamb. The taking of the scroll means that the Lamb is worthy to do this. The previous question wasn’t “Who *can* take the scroll.” It was “Who is *worthy* to take the scroll.” There is no one in the entire universe who is qualified for this kind of action. Only the sacrificial Lamb/Jesus is qualified for this kind of action. Why?

If you are a Christian, can I remind you that the only way for your sins to have been forgiven was the perfect sacrifice of Jesus? God’s atonement was only possible for you because of the sacrifice of Jesus.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

But you need to know that your personal forgiveness isn’t the entire story! God’s plan for redemption involves deliverance and judgment. He’s not only going to cleanse you through the sacrifice of Jesus; his aim is to remove the very presence of sin and death and the devil from the world. This scroll and this Lamb are the means by which God is taking back the world. But he does it through sacrifice.

If you’ve not yet repented of your sins and turned to Jesus, it’s important for you to understand this moment in Revelation because it is key for the entire Bible and for your life. God’s plan of redemption and the forgiveness of sins comes through one person: Jesus. He’s the only way that your sins can be forgiven. He’s the only sacrifice that will result in eternal cleansing. God’s plan for forgiveness requires sacrifice, and it came through the person and work of Jesus.

There’s a glorious plan for redemption through Jesus. But there’s even more!

² Ian Paul, [Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary](#), ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 134.

3. Worship (vv. 8-14)

The purpose of the plan of God is not merely deliverance and judgment. God's ultimate aim is displayed by his glory. And when this is understood or observed, it leads to worship. This is the destination of history.

This worship begins in verse 8 as the Lamb takes the scroll. Immediately the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, with harps of praise and prayers for justice, fall down in worship. They praise the Lamb with a new song about the mission of God (v. 9)

This song exults in the worthiness of the Lamb for his sacrifice, which led to the purchasing of people for God. Notice where these people are from: "every tribe and language and people and nation." The Bible could have simply said from the whole world. But this is more specific. The world is marked by division, separation, and collective power along these lines of tribe, language, people, and nation. Wars are fought along these lines. Senses of superiority and partiality follow the well-worn pathways of tribe, language, people, and nation. The punishment at the Tower of Babel was a scattered people with different languages. And now we see the power of redemption to destroy this worldly stronghold and unite people through their redemption in Jesus.

Take note how central this is to the mission of God! That's why I believe so passionately that reaching unreached peoples and working toward racial reconciliation are both vital to our gospel mission. Neither of them both are easy, and neither will be completed until Jesus comes back, but they are worth working toward, even now. The Lamb is worthy!

The worship continues. Actually, it expands. You might think of this as the ripple effect of a boulder thrown into a body of water. Worship crescendos out from the throne room. In verse 11 John sees and hears the voice of innumerable angels who praise the Lamb with "power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing."

Then the worship crescendos even further to include the entire created order: "Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea" (v. 13). Anything with life begins to praise the Father and the Lamb. Imagine: angels and seraphim, men and women, young and old, eagles and ospreys, sparrows and vultures, deer and coyote, bison and elk, salmon and bluegill, orcas and sharks, jellyfish and stingray, crickets and spiders, moles and worms – all join a chorus of worship.

I love to walk outside in the early morning, while the air is cold and my coffee is hot, just to listen. There's a ravine behind our house that is filled with the morning territory-claiming songs of thousands of birds. Sometimes the volume is overwhelming. Each bird staking its claim in the morning light.

Imagine what it would be like to have every single living creature lend its voice to this anthem: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (v. 13). The chapter concludes with a final "Amen" as the elders fall down in worship. All of this is designed to be an overwhelming moment of worship that rumbles like thunder from the throne outward. It's an earthquake of worship, a tsunami of glory.

Revelation 5 is a chapter about the plan of redemption that leads to worship.

Remember that this text is given to help us endure and persevere. It takes us into the throne room of heaven to see the glorious plan of God unfolding through the sacrifice of the Lamb. It shows us the way of conquering that comes through suffering. Revelation reminds us – even calls us – to not read this book academically or with a fascination about the future. John wants our imagination to be captured with what he sees so that our hearts will be led in worship.

What kind of perspective change do you need today? What kind of reorientation needs to take place in your soul? Revelation 5 invites us to come “further up, further in” so that we see the plan of God in redemption as we are compelled to worship.

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