

THE APOCALYPSE – A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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ONLY THE LAMB IS WORTHY! (5:1-14)

The Significance is the Worthy One (Revelation 5:1-14)

A. A Sealed Book With no Worthy Person to Open it – 5:1-4

Revelation 5:1-4, *"And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon."*

i. **"A Sealed Book"** – It is not the kind of book with pages like we know books today. It is in scroll form, very much like the one Ezekiel was told to eat. Ezekiel 2:9-10, *"And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe."*

This book must not be understood as a will but rather a deed or contract. "This kind of contract was known all over the Middle East in ancient times and was used by the Romans from the time of Nero on. The full contract would be written on the inner pages and sealed with seven seals. Then the content of the contract would be described briefly on the outside. All kinds of transactions were consummated this way, including marriage-contracts, rental and lease agreements, release of slaves, contract-bills, and bonds. Support also comes from Hebrew practices. The Hebrew document most closely resembling this scroll was a title-deed that was folded and signed, requiring at least three witnesses. A portion of text would be written, folded over and sealed, with a different witness signing at each fold. A larger number of witnesses meant that more importance was assigned to the document." [Robert L. Thomas, **Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 378.]

A good OT example of this title deed is found in Jeremiah 32. See especially Jer. 32:9-15. The deed that John saw was the "title" deed to the earth. It reveals not only the extent of Christ's inheritance (explain in Rev 21 and 22) but it also explains the method in which Jesus Christ will reclaim His inheritance. His inheritance, as it were, was now owned by the Prince of this world.

John 12:31, "*Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.*"

Hence Satan was able to offer the kingdoms of the world to Christ if He would only worship him. Matthew 4:8-9, "*Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*" In other words the offer of Satan was genuine.

The One holding the Book in His right hand is none other than God the Father. It is as if the Father is presenting the Book to anyone who can open it. It is now TIME for the final revelation to be revealed. The revelation of the last days of man's existence is at hand. Remember Genesis? The world plunged into sin and chaos because of the subtle temptation of Satan. He deceived Eve and Eve in turn caused Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit. Death entered into the world and it has interrupted man's existence on earth ever since. What will become of death, and Hell? What will become of wicked men and Satan and his demons? What will happen to those who remain faithful to Christ until death? What will become of this world that has been stained by sin for thousands of years? Will Satan ever be punished? Will believers who died for the Word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ be vindicated? These and many more such questions will find their answers when the sealed Book is opened. This would refer to Revelations 6 to 22.

ii. **“Worthy”** – Who is worthy to open the book was the clarion call made by the strong angel. To be worthy means “to be deserving.” A person who has the merits or qualification to take the Book from the right hand of God the Father and then to open the seals.

General worthiness from man's perspective -- 1 Timothy 6:1, "*Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.*" 1 Timothy 5:18, "*For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.*"

Worthy to be punished -- Hebrews 10:29, "*Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*"

The world was not worthy of the believers -- Hebrews 11:38, "*(Of whom the world was not worthy) they wandered in*

deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

The believers are worthy of Heaven -- Revelation 3:4, "*Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.*"

Jesus Christ is worthy to be worshipped -- Revelation 4:11, "*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*"

What kind of worth is required here to take from God the Father's hand the sealed book and then to open it?

"Who, he asked, has the innate, virtuous worthiness of character and the divine right that would qualify him to break the seals? And who has the power to defeat Satan and his demon host, to wipe out sin and its effect, and to reverse the curse on all creation? (**MacArthur**, vol. 1, 164-165)."

Do you agree with MacArthur's assessment? The answer to this question lies in the next few verses.

iii. John saw no one worthy – A search of the entire universe, from heaven to earth to under the earth and John found no one who has the necessary qualifications. The book was so near and yet so far as the saying goes. John wept much when he found no one to open it.

The word for weeping is "*klaio*." The same word used to describe Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (cf. Lk. 19:41), and Peter's bitter weeping after he betrayed the Lord (cf. Lk. 22:62). It is a word that embodies a strong intense heart-felt anguish which expresses itself in an outward demonstration of great unrestrained emotions of tears and sorrow. This is the only time in Scriptures where tears are recorded in heaven (cf. Rev 7:17; 21:4).

"[John's tears] represent the tears of all God's people through all the centuries. Those tears of the Apostle John are the tears of Adam and Eve, driven out of the Garden of Eden, as they bowed over the first grave, as they watered the dust of the ground with their tears over the silent, still form of their son, Abel. Those are the tears of the children of Israel in bondage as they cried unto God in their affliction and slavery. They are the tears of God's elect through the centuries as they cried unto heaven. They are the sobs and tears that have been wrung from the heart and soul of God's people as they looked on their silent dead, as they stand beside their open graves, as they experience in the trials and sufferings of life, heartaches and disappointments indescribable. Such is the curse that sin has laid upon God's beautiful creation; and this is the damnation at the hand of him who holds it, that usurper, that interloper, that intruder, that alien, that stranger, that dragon, that serpent, that Satan-devil. "And I wept audibly," for the failure to find a Redeemer meant that this earth in its curse is consigned forever to death. It meant that death, sin, damnation and hell should reign forever and ever and the sovereignty of God's earth should remain forever in the hands of Satan." [W.

A. Criswell, **Expository Sermons on Revelation**, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), 3:69-70].

John demonstrates an emotion rarely seen in our materialistic world today. The love for God's revelation which was withheld from John caused him to weep uncontrollably. If it had been anyone of us it would probably be just a cold hearted indifference. Perhaps, we will just simply pass it off as "if God wants to, He would but if not never mind" kind of an attitude. How sad. The apathy Christians have for the Word of God is pandemic. The kind of nonchalant attitude seen in professing Christians today when the Word of God comes under attack is symptomatic of a materialistic heart. We fend and fight tooth and nail when our property comes under attack. We cry for justice when our name is slandered. We demand an apology when our words are taken out of context or when we are called liars.

But when the Word of God is attacked we keep silent and say "my salvation is secured" it matters not if there are mistakes in the Bible! God is made a liar and His name is assaulted and all we care about is "am I going to heaven or not?" "What matters is my Christian life!" Whether God has preserved His Holy Word is not important to me! We measure importance with anthropocentric self-seeking myopic eyes that as long as the great "I" is not jeopardized nothing else matters. This is the kind of apathy that destroy churches and generations of hard fought ministries.

Thank God that there was a "John" who wept much because he could not find someone to open God's book of revelation. Daniel was like John too in their love for God's Truth. Daniel 7:15-16, "*I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things.*"

B. The Sealed Book was Taken by the Worthy One – 5:5-7

Revelation 5:5-7, "*And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.*"

i. The Worthy One is Found – One of the elders told John to stop weeping. John was told to look! the Lion of the tribe of Judah – a direct reference to Genesis 49:8-10. This was the blessing of Jacob to his son Judah. The picture of a "lion" is that of ferocity and dominance. Jesus will now come to conquer and not be "conquered." He comes not as a suffering Messiah but as the conquering Messiah. This image of Jesus Christ was what the Jews expected at Jesus' first coming. In their opinion, He failed to deliver them from the bondage of Rome and that was why Judas betrayed Christ and the Jews as well (cf. Jn. 6:15; 18:36).

The Root of David means the descendant of David. This was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah.

Isaiah 11:1-10, "*And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.*"

One of the greatest credentials to Christ's authenticate claim is the fulfillment of prophecies.

ii. Only Jesus is Worthy – "He has prevailed." When did this happen? Christ "prevailed" when He died on Calvary's Cross! He defeated death and Satan at the Cross! Hebrews 2:14-15, "*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*"

Jesus is able to loose i.e. to open the seven seals of the book.

Jesus was standing in the midst of the throne, of the four living beings and of the elders. Christ stood in the midst of all of God's Heavenly creatures. He stood together with all and yet uniquely alone and above everyone else.

He is depicted as a Lamb that was slain! This was the imagery of the Passover Lamb (a little lamb or a pet lamb is used here in Revelation). The scars were seen of the lamb. He was standing signifying that he will be acting very soon. The only other time Jesus stood in heaven (as He normally sit on the Father's right hand) was when Stephen died and Jesus stood to receive him into His everlasting presence (cf. Acts 7:56). This is a picture of the resurrected Christ who will soon be enforcing His power and sovereign rule over the wicked world and Satan.

Seven Horns and seven Eyes – Seven is the number of perfection and horns symbolize power. Together it

represents a sovereign and absolute power possessed by Jesus Christ. Seven eyes depict His omniscience just as seven horns depict His omnipotence.

Seven Spirits of God – This phrase depicts the fullness of the Spirit of God. Here we have a clear representation of God the Father (who sits on the throne), God the Son who is the slain Lamb of God standing in the midst of the whole heavenly scenario, and now it also includes the presence of the Holy Spirit of God. The judgement that follows will be the work of the Trine God!

The Oneness of Christ and the Holy Spirit is revealed here in very clear terms. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter whom Christ said He would send when He had to be crucified. John 14:16-17, *“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”* This sending or coming and going of the Holy Spirit must not be understood in human terms. The Holy Spirit is omnipresent. He does not come and go the way we do. What Christ meant was that it was time for the Holy Spirit of God to manifest Himself just as God the Father manifested Himself in the OT and the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospels. A thorough study of the whole Bible will give us a god understanding into the working and character of the Trinity.

The Lord Jesus Christ has arrived and will now take back what had always been His. The fulfillment of God’s will on earth as it is in Heaven. The Lamb of God approached the father and took the sealed book from the right hand of God. What a relief and marvelous sight that beheld the Apostle John. At last the revelation of the last things will be made known to him and to all believers who love the LORD and His Holy and perfect Word.

Revelation 5:7, *“And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.”*

C. The Reaction to the One Who is Worthy – 5:8-14

Revelation 5:8-14, *“And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.”*

i. Worship the Lamb – when Jesus took the Book, the living beings and the 24 elders, fell down before the Lamb in worship. He who is worthy is worthy to be worshipped. The four living beasts represent the angelic beings in worship and the raptured and resurrected and glorified saints also bowed down in worship.

Jesus is sovereign but the day has not yet come for Him to reign fully and completely until His enemies are dealt with and made His footstool.

Psalms 2:6-12, *"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."*

Hebrews 1:13, *"But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?"*

Hebrews 10:12-13, *"But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool."*

The reason is not because Jesus Christ was weak for He is the Almighty Son of God incarnate. The reason for the delay was due to the plan of God's salvation where the last one to be saved has not been saved yet. It is therefore for our sakes that the return of Christ has tarried all these years.

ii. Prayers and worship of the saints – (*The grammatical structure of the text suggests that only the 24 elders who held these two items and not the 4 living beings.*) Harp is associated with worship and the golden vials full of odours represent the prayers of the believers. These vials are the wide-mouthed bowls used by the priests in the Temple worship. They represent the intercessory work of the priests on behalf of the people of God. Taken together it means that what the payers of God's people have been praying for all these centuries are about to be accomplished by their Redeemer-God.

Worship and prayer are two of the most neglected Christian activities today. Those who desire to worship like the Charismatics, worship in carnality and in falsehood. Those who have the right manner of worship drag their feet and desire not to worship in spirit (from the heart with sincerity) and in truth according to Holy Scriptures). What a

contradiction we are living in today. But in heaven when the saints of God and all the angelic beings bow before the Lamb of God it will be from the heart and forever. What a great day of rejoicing that will be.

The prayers of the saints will soon be answered. What would the prayers of the saints that are left unanswered today and can only be answered in the last days? The cry of justice as mentioned in Rev. 6:10-11.

iii. Praises of the saints only – When their prayers are about to be answered the saints in heaven praise the LORD. They sang a new (new in terms of time) song. What is this new song? (Cf. Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10; Rev. 14:3) The new song is apparently the song of redemption. The central figure is the Redeemer and not the redeemed. Every believer from every nation and every tongue will be singing this new song. He one glorious united heavenly song of praise to the King of kings and Lord of lords. What a glorious and magnificent sight to behold and experience! Christ is worthy to take the sealed book and to open the seals of the book.

The reasons given by the saints are:

for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;--Christ was slain on Calvary for us. He redeemed us with His precious blood. He therefore is worthy to represent all the saints in heaven by taking the book from the right hand of God. He not only represents us but He also owns us. The right of worthiness is Messiah-ship.

And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth--The act of Jesus Christ in making the believers into kings and priests is mentioned as the second reason for Christ's worthiness. This is the climax of our salvation. It is all a gracious act from God, and not one that we deserve. Sinful human beings will be future kings and priests ruling with Christ.

Will this dual function be in the future only and not applicable today? Not so says Peter in 1 Peter 2:5, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Also in 1 Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Both these verses teach that right now, every genuine believer is a king and a priest. But the full manifestation of this God given honour will be made a reality when our King Jesus Christ comes down on earth and we will rule with Him. Hence the phrase: "we shall reign on the earth" is in the future tense. In the mean time, every believer is expected to live like royal and holy priests. This is the thrust of the epistle of Peter.

iv. Praises of both the angels and the saints – The apostle John saw millions and billions of saints

and angelic beings all praising God together with a loud united voice.

The praises of the two groups combined together focus on the attributes of Christ as God. “*Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*”

To receive power-- It is the power or authority to rule over all things. There are two kinds of power. The power that belongs to God alone is inherent in His being as God. The other aspect of power is based upon Christ's mediatorial work on Calvary. It is the power over death and power to silence Satan so that no accusing finger can be pointed at Christ's children. The justice of God has been met in Christ Jesus when He died for believers. It is the latter kind of power that is referred to here.

To receive riches-- It means “Abundance or valuable bestowment.” Christ is worthy to be given all that is worthy and all that contributes to honour, and glory, and happiness. These should all be conferred on Christ in *abundance*. Christ owns all things as the Creator of the universe. The riches here would probably refer to the kingdoms that will be His to rule and possess for all eternity based upon His mediatorial work as our Saviour.

To receive wisdom—Christ is all knowing even before His incarnation. What then is this wisdom mentioned here that He is worthy to receive? It is the wisdom that requires the Son of God to become the Son of Man in order that the sons of man may become the sons of God. It is the wisdom that is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. But to all believers it is the power and wisdom of God to save us.

1 Corinthians 1:21-25, “*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; **But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.***” [Emphasis added]

To receive strength—This refers to Christ's “ability to accomplish his purposes.” It is the strength in fulfilling all that God demanded from the Son of Man. This includes the weeping and tears and overcoming the temptations of Satan and the pleadings from His own disciples not to go to the cross and finally to overcome the humiliation of the persecutions and crucifixion at the hands of the people He came to save! It is the inner strength of character and will to do His Father's will in saving us.

To receive honour—The word means “to be esteemed highly.” Christ is indeed to be esteemed by all the saints as it was in Him and through Him that they are all delivered from the bondage of sin and hell.

To receive glory—“This word refers to a *higher* ascription of praise than the word *honour*. Perhaps that might refer to the honour which we feel in our hearts; this to the expression of that by the language of praise.” [Albert Barnes' Note on the Bible, Swordsearcher, 4.7]

To receive blessing—“Everything which would express the desire that he might be happy, honoured, adored. To bless one is to desire that he may have happiness and prosperity; that he may be successful, respected, and honoured. To bless God, or to ascribe blessing to him, is that state where the heart is full of love and gratitude, and where it desires that he may be everywhere honoured, loved, and obeyed as he should be. The words here express the wish that the universe would ascribe to the Redeemer all honour, and that he might be everywhere loved and adored.” [Barnes]

After that all the creatures in heaven, in earth and under the earth and in the sea sang, "*Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*" and this is followed by the agreement from the angels with an "*Amen.*"(5:11-14) All that has breath in its nostrils will praise the LORD.

"Amen" means "may it be so" or "let it be" or "make it happen." The angels were in full agreement with all that the saints of God were singing and proclaiming.

Then this is followed by the worshipped of all the 24 elders forever and ever. What a glorious and thrilling hope to look forward to as we sojourn on this earth. We know that this is what awaits every truly born again believers who love the Lord and who serve Him faithfully.

What shall we do in the mean time while we wait for God's plan of the last days to be unfolded before our eyes?

Romans 8:14-25, "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."*