

## The Lion and the Lamb

### Revelation 5

One of the interpretive principles that we need to grasp as we seek to understand the Book of Revelation is the reality that the narratives in prophetic scripture don't necessarily unfold in a chronological manner. This is true, really, for the whole of scripture, but we're not used to thinking in these terms. We number chapters and verses and since 4 comes after 3, and 12 after 1, we get the sense that the visions recounted in the later chapters must come after those in the former. But at Christmas, when we looked at Revelation chapter 12, we saw the unfolding of the whole story of human history: the woman crying out in childbirth took us back to Genesis 3, where God promised that the seed—the offspring—of the woman would bruise the serpent's head; the child to whom she gave birth—the One who would rule the nations with a rod of iron (hopefully that image sounds at least a little familiar after our call to worship this morning), who was caught up to God and to his throne is that offspring, Jesus, who is called the Christ; and the great red dragon (that old serpent, the devil) who is busy even now seeking whom he may devour; this is the big story of the world from nearly the beginning down to this very day, and even though it's chapter 12, it does not come **after** the vision of Christ among the lamp-stands, seen by John in Revelation chapter 1.

And, in a sense, neither does chapter 5 come after chapter 4. Chapter 4, the text that we considered over the last couple of weeks brought us before the throne of God Himself, into the Holy of Holies behind the veil, where we saw with John a vision of the Living God—the Ancient of Days (as He is known in Daniel)—seated upon His throne, surrounded by the cherubim, and worshipped incessantly by both them and the church. Remember? Revelation 4, verses 9 – 11?

<sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne,

(which was described in these terms, “day and night they never cease...”, so)

whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne who lives forever and ever [which is always], <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders [representing the church] fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” Revelation 4:9-11 (ESV)

Well, that has been ongoing since the beginning of time, and will carry on forever. Our God is worthy of that much praise. Nothing less. But in Revelation chapter 5, it's as if John had been standing in one spot witnessing all of this, and then took a step one way or the other and was given a glimpse of something that he had not noticed before. Revelation 5, verse 1:

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. Revelation 5: 1 (ESV)

Now, remember, this is not “chronological”, either in terms of the structure of Revelation, or in terms of John’s own life. In a way, here, he’s travelling back in time. The scroll, “written within and on the back”, as it is described, should take us back to Exodus 32, verse 5, where

...Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written. Exodus 32:5 (ESV)

The tablets in Exodus 32 were, of course, God’s covenant carved in stone—two copies (as a matter of fact)—meant to be stored eventually in the Ark of the Covenant beneath the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. There is good reason to believe that in the vision in Revelation 5, John is being taken back to a time before the resurrection and ascension of Christ—an event that he had witnessed with his own eyes—to a time when the Scroll of God’s Covenant remained sealed because no one had ever been able to keep it. That would of course explain what follows.

First, a mighty angel proclaims with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And when “no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it”, John writes in verse 4,

I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

Because no one, from the time of Adam’s fall on down through history, had ever been worthy—had ever kept the terms of God’s covenant—and so been found “worthy” to open the scroll, and to bring redemption to the people of God. For John then, this vision had become something of a nightmare, because he was personally witness to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus; he knew that redemption had been accomplished by “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”, words he heard spoken of Jesus by John the baptist on the day that he first met the Christ. So, the idea that somehow the terms of the covenant remain to be fulfilled causes John distress, and he begins to weep, “loudly”, at the very thought.

But he is not left in his distress for long. In verse 5 he wrote:

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.” Revelation 5:5 (ESV)

Now, we don’t have a lot of time to deal with this this morning, but at least note that the titles given for Jesus here are titles related to his humanity. He is the lion “of the tribe of Judah” as to his human ancestry. He is the root of David, speaking to his right as the descendant of David to be King. This is important because when we’re talking about keeping the terms of the covenant we have to remember that God has always kept the terms of His covenants. God keeps his promises; always has; always will. It’s the other side—our side—where the terms have consistently been broken. The first Adam, the perfect man in the perfect environment,

having all the advantages of a face to face relationship with God, broke faith—he broke the covenant that had been made with him—disobeying God and throwing away the dominion—the kingdom—which had been assigned to him in that covenant, and bringing death to all of his offspring,

just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... Romans 5:12 (ESV)

So, the mediator we require (and this is right out of the Heidelberg), must be “truly human” because “God’s justice demands that human nature, which has sinned, must pay for its sin...” In other words, it is the human side of the covenant that has been broken, it is a human—the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David”; the second man and the last Adam, as Paul describes Him in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15—who must pay. And he has. The elder said, “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.”

Now here is another important interpretive principle that we need to carry forward with us. In verse 5, John **heard** something. The elder **said**... But in verse 6, he **sees**.

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders **I saw** a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain... Revelation 5: 6 (ESV)

Which is a remarkable description all on its own. “...a Lamb **standing, as though it had been slain**...” When viewing a slain lamb, we might have expected something more along the lines of a corpse lying on the floor, not “a Lamb **standing**...” Still, before we move on, it’s important to notice the pattern, I heard and I saw, because in Revelation what John hears and then sees (or sometimes the other way ‘round), usually (if not always) describe each other. In this case, the lion is the lamb and the lamb is the lion, and since we start with what we know, it’s important to know that the same Jesus whom we have met before as the Lamb of God, is in fact, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.”

Jesus is both Savior and King. He is Savior **and** Lord. He cannot in fact be one and not the other. We do not come to know him as Savior and then decide later on whether or not we will let Him be our Lord. He is “the Lamb of God” who takes away our sin, but in doing so, he becomes King of kings and Lord of Lords. And I know, I keep coming back to Philippians 2, but this is so important.

though he was in the form of God, [the Son] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant... Philippians 2: 6 – 7 (ESV)

**Therefore** God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... Philippians 2: 9 – 10 (ESV)

He is Savior **and** Lord. He is Lion **and** Lamb. Remember, this is

The revelation of Jesus Christ... Revelation 1:1 (ESV)

This is the point of the book; to see and understand who Jesus is today. And our text this morning will take us there. Verse 6 and 7:

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. Revelation 5: 6 – 7 (ESV)

So, this Lamb is a little unusual to say the least. Not only is he **standing** as though slain, He has “seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” Thus having established the humanity of Jesus, John now presents us with His deity. In prophecy, horns speak of power and authority, and in our text, the 7 horns speak of complete power and authority—in fact, the power and authority of the Godhead. Remember Matthew 28; Jesus said:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Matthew 28:18 (ESV)

And in Daniel, chapter 7, the prophet said,

<sup>13</sup> “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him...

(remember that, by the way; it will come up again)

his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13 – 14 (ESV)

Jesus is the Lamb with 7 horns then, precisely because he is “the Lamb **of God**” but he also has “seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” And, of course, we saw the 7 Spirits (or 7-fold Spirit) of God in the 7 torches that were blazing before the throne in the last chapter as well. But here the Holy Spirit is associated not only with the Father, or with God in general, but also with the Son. The Nicene Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit proceeding “from the Father **and** the Son” and it’s true. He does. The eyes of the Lamb are the Seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the world.

So Jesus is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” but he is also the “Lamb...with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God.” He is Son of Man, but also Son of God. He is fully human, as he needed to be to keep the covenant, but he is also fully God, so that he could keep it for us—“so that, by the power of his divinity, he might bear the weight of God’s anger in His humanity and earn for us and restore to us righteousness and life.”

This is why, when the Lamb takes the scroll from the hand of the one who is seated on the throne—when the Son, having been found worthy, takes the scroll of the covenant from the hand of the Father—John saw,

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. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song... Revelation 5: 8 – 9 (ESV)

Now remember, these are the living creatures of chapter 4, the cherubim of Ezekiel and the Seraphim of Isaiah, who sang,

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” Revelation 4: 8 (ESV)

causing the twenty-four elders to

fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever...saying, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power...” Revelation 4: 9 – 11 (ESV)

Now, together, they sing 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.” “Revelation 5: 9 – 10 (ESV)

And note the reason for their (our) praise. “...for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation...” So, “What can wash away my sin?” (what can wash away your sin?) “**Nothing** but the blood of Jesus.” I don’t want to dwell on this this morning, but I do want to say it as certainly and as forcefully as I can, because this is an issue in some parts of the church today, and there’s even an overture on this which was supposed to go to Synod last June, asking Synod to

Declare that it is a grievous deviation from sound doctrine, a heresy, to in any way deny that Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection provide a substitutionary work of bearing God’s wrath on our behalf because of the just punishment we deserve for our sin.

This is biblical and it’s extremely important.

<sup>18</sup> knowing [**knowing**] that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

“**Nothing** but the blood of Jesus...” This is non-negotiable, and far from being a reason for embarrassment, it is a reason for highest praise.

“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,

But also,

you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

“Revelation 5: 9 – 10 (ESV)

In other words, “you have restored to your people the kingdom—the dominion—that the first Adam gave up so cheaply in the garden of Eden. See, Jesus is Savior, and Jesus is Lord. As both, he is worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals. As man, he has kept God’s covenant perfectly, and as God, he did so for us, and for our salvation. Worthy indeed...

But watch what happens next. When the cherubim and the elders had finished their song, John writes,

<sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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!” Revelation 5:11–12 (ESV)

So get the picture; four incredibly powerful, awesome beings beyond human comprehension have spent their part of eternity just worshipping the living God; singing, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the almighty.” Then, in the fullness of time, the church joins the choir, and the song is changed but not really. They sing,

“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,

Then, the whole company of angels, myriads of myriads, ten thousands of ten thousands, an innumerable company of millions, picks up the refrain.

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain...

It’s like a string quartet beginning a theme which is then picked up by the whole symphony orchestra, and as the power and the majesty of the music crescendos, the choir joins the song. And just when you think this can’t possibly get any more majestic, as the whole company of saints and angels cry out,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain...

John hears a still louder counterpoint. Verse 13.

<sup>13</sup> 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!” Revelation 5:13 (ESV)

See, the point of this book is to reveal Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lamb, standing as though slain in the midst of the throne, having prevailed so as to break the seals and open the scroll. And when we see him so revealed, what do we do?

We worship. We join the chorus of the cherubim, and we lead the whole host of saints and angels gathered around the throne, and we worship. This is the revelation of Jesus Christ. This is the mission of the church.