

THE SCROLL AND THE ONE WHO OPENS IT – REVELATION 5

INTRODUCTION

- There is no break in continuity between chapters four and five
- The focus of chapter four is the throne of God; the focus of chapter five is the scroll with seven seals and the One who receives it

THE SUBSTANCE OF HEAVENLY WORSHIP CON'T (VS. 1-14)

It is Christ-Focused

- In Revelation 5, the scene shifts from God the Father (4:2 ~ the one who sits on the throne) and the God the Holy Spirit (4:5 ~ there were 7 lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God) to God the Son
- Christ dominates this chapter and which shows that heaven is thoroughly Christ-focused in its worship
- This means that the substance and content of true worship is the birth, the life, the ministry, the perfection, the teaching, the suffering, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, and the return of Jesus Christ

Revelation 5:1 ~ 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.

- God does not have a literal “right hand” since He is a spirit and has no body; John is using human terms to communicate attributes of God
- The right hand indicates the place of position and power and strength
- In the right hand of God was a “book written inside and on the back,” a *biblion*
- This was most likely a scroll, rolled from both ends into the middle
- Typical of scrolls in that day, the inside contained the details and the outside contained a summary
- It was “sealed up with seven seals,” probably not seven seals all on the outside along the edge because in Revelation 6, they are broken one by one in a progressive fashion, not all at once
- The scroll was probably rolled up to a certain point and a seal put upon the edge, then rolled to another point and another seal was put on and so on until there were six seals on the edge of the scroll and one seal closing the entire scroll
- When the first seal was broken, a certain portion of the book was exposed and so it was with each successive breaking of the seals
- A number of different views exist for the identity of this scroll:
 1. A will that describes the inheritance reserved in heaven by God for the saints
 2. The Lamb’s book of life described elsewhere in Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12)
- But this scroll was most likely a contract or a deed, something used frequently in that culture for official documents (i.e. marriage contracts, lease agreements, contract bills, deeds to property)

- There is an illustration of this document in Jeremiah 32 where it is called a “deed of purchase”
- Jeremiah purchased the land and was given a “title deed” to the land which demonstrated that he owned that land and that one day after the Babylonian exile his descendants could claim that land as theirs on the basis of this title deed
- The scroll in Revelation 5 is likely a similar document, a title deed
- Specifically, it is a title deed to the earth which God the Father will give to Christ
- Although Revelation 5 does not identify the contents of the scroll, it does describe how Christ will claim the earth as His own inheritance
- He will do so by the divine judgments about to be poured out on the earth such that the seal judgments will lead to the trumpet judgments which will lead to the bowl judgments, leading ultimately to Christ’s return to inherit the earth
- The scroll is a one of doom and judgment, but it shows how Christ will ultimately redeem His people and redeem the world from Satan
- Thus, the title deed contains a plan for the future that gives the successive steps that lead to the inauguration of the world kingdom of Christ when He comes to rule and reign with all authority on the earth
- It is a book whose contents are enacted, not read...resulting in the title deed of the earth being given to Christ as the rightful owner and ruler of it
- “Thus the scroll seems to contain the story of humanity’s losing its lordship over creation and the regaining of that authority by the man Christ Jesus. The scroll might be titled the “Book of Redemption” since it contains the story of redemption to its final consummation, not only in relation to humanity but also in relation to the world. Satan had usurped what God originally gave to humanity in Adam, and Christ the Redeemer reclaimed cursed humanity and the cursed earth (cf. Heb. 2:5-9).”¹

Revelation 5:2 ~ And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?”

- This angel (perhaps Gabriel) spoke with a “loud voice,” a *phone megale*
- Presumably his “loud voice” is heard throughout the entire creation, penetrating into the remotest extremities of the universe
- This is a cosmic challenge that goes out to the utter reaches of creation
- The summons is to anyone who is “worthy” to approach the throne, the one described in chapter four with God the Father seated on it in all His splendor and majesty
- Who can approach a God like this?
- The summons is also to anyone who is able to “open the book and to break its seals”
- Who has the authority and power to unleash the script of human destiny? To defeat Satan and his demons? To wipe out sin and its effects? To reverse the curse on all of creation? To redeem this earth? To undo the great tragedy that sin has caused on the earth? To fix this broken planet?
- These questions have been asked since Adam fell
- When God created the earth, He gave Adam the title deed as vice-regent over God’s creation
- He gave him dominion over the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the field with the responsibility to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it
- But when Adam sinned, he lost not only his dominion but the title deed to the earth as well
- He forfeited the right to fully subdue the earth resulting in the title deed to earth going back to God

¹ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation* in Everyday Bible Commentary, 56.

- Ever since then, there has been a constant effort on the part of man to win it back, believing that the scroll of human destiny lies in the hands of man
- Man has sought to restore earth through science, reason, philosophy, etc.
- But all of man's efforts to restore earth have failed, demonstrating that the scroll of human destiny lies not in man's hands, but in the hands of the sovereign God who sits enthroned in majesty
- Mankind's problems cannot be fixed by mankind because the problem with mankind lies within mankind not without
- As a result, someone greater is required to fix the problems of a world that has been cursed by sin and wickedness, Someone unlike man, Someone not a part of the problem, but outside it
- It is this "Someone" the angel with the "loud voice" is looking for...Someone who will redeem earth and become its rightful owner

Revelation 5:3 ~ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.

- Rather than a three-fold description of the created realm, this is most likely a reference to the entire universe
- The invitation went out to the entire universe but nobody answered
- There was just deafening silence because nobody was adequate
 - The four living creatures remain silent
 - The millions of angels in heaven remain silent
 - The 24 elders remain silent
 - The redeemed saints from the ages (including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and the rest of the apostles) all remain silent
- The search comes up empty

Revelation 5:4 ~ Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it

- John was overwhelmed by grief and began to sob and to weep bitterly
- "weep" = imperfect tense = "kept on shedding many tears"
- "weep" means "to mourn, to lament, to bewail, with emphasis upon the noise accompanying the weeping"
- This is the kind of weeping and wailing that accompanies great pain, sorrow, and sadness
- He weeps because he sees the effect of sin and the fact that no one can do anything about it
- He also weeps because he knows that, if the seals on the book are not opened, then the events which bring about the end and the restoration of the earth to its rightful owner will not be realized
- John weeps greatly as waves of sorrow wash over him, confronted with the possibility that the curse would never be undone and earth would remain in the hands of the evil one

Revelation 5:5 ~ 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."

- Just when there appeared to be no hope, heaven breaks in
- John's tears are premature since, although there are none in heaven or on the earth or under the earth who are worthy to open the book, there is One who is worthy
- There is a man who is uniquely qualified...the man Jesus Christ!
- He is "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah," a name derived from Jacob's blessing the tribe of Judah

Genesis 49:8-10 ~ Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

- Christ is the powerful lion who will come to rule and reign over His people (cf. Rev 19:11-19)
- He is also the "Root of David," a Messianic title from Isaiah:

Isaiah 11:1 ~ Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit

- This title refers to the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of David, the greater David who will ultimately fulfill the promises of the Davidic covenant by ruling on the throne of David in the millennial kingdom
- The reason Christ is worthy to take the scroll is because He "has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals"
- Christ has overcome by defeating sin at the cross, inflicting a mortal blow on Satan, canceling out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, disarming the rulers and authorities, and rising from the dead
- Likely, John expected to turn and see a regal-looking lion, but what John saw was something completely opposite...

Revelation 5:6 ~ 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.

- Although He is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah, what John sees is a lamb!
- The point is unmistakable: What qualifies Christ to take the scroll is that He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world
- This Lamb is standing, ready to complete His work and assume the rule which is rightly His
- This Lamb has been slain, speaking of Christ's substitutionary death for sin
- This Lamb is alive, speaking His resurrection
- Footnote...the evidence of Christ's death as the Lamb of God remains in eternity
- Forever His wounds will remind His people of the cost of their redemption
- Even though Christ lives in heaven, He still bears the marks of His sacrificial death
- These marks will serve as perpetual reminders of the great cost of our salvation and redemption
- Forever we will be reminded that we had a debt we could not pay and He paid a debt He did not owe
- The 7 horns speak of His power and omnipotence
- The 7 eyes represent the fullness of the Holy Spirit who searches all things with divine omniscience
- Because of all of this, He – and only He – is qualified to open the scroll
- Only Christ is the legitimate heir, the only One who is able to take the book out of the Hand of God

Revelation 5:7 ~ And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

- This is the climax of the scene in heaven, the final, monumental act which inaugurates the culminating act of history

- This is the event that begins the cascading events in Revelation that culminate in Christ ruling and reigning on the earth as the rightful King of Kings and Lord of Lords!
- This is the most climactic act in all of history because it guarantees the regaining of all that was lost
- This is what ends the groaning of creation
- This is the same vision Daniel saw

Daniel 7:13-14 ~ I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.

- As the rest of the chapter reveals, this is grounds for Christ-centered worship
- The worthy One has been found and He will one day unleash the events which will result in all of God's promises being fulfilled
- Thus, heaven is consumed in its worship of the Lion and the Lamb
- By way of implication, Christ is the supreme and singular focus of genuine worship
- Biblical worship is not primarily about style; rather, it is about substance
- It's not primarily about our efforts, creativity, or talent...it's not about how we feel or look...it's about the person and work of Christ

It is Gospel-Saturated

- The theme of heavenly worship is the Gospel; it is shaped by the contours of Christ's redeeming work
- The work of Christ at Calvary serves as the fuel which fans the flames of heavenly worship
- Heaven is thoroughly preoccupied with the fact that Christ was slain and He has saved us
- We have already seen two of the majestic doxologies which ring the courts of heaven in chapter four: Rev 4:8 and Rev 4:11
- To those two doxologies now are added three more: Rev 5:9-10, Rev 5:12, and Rev 5:13
- No sooner is the scroll taken up by Christ, than an outburst of celestial worship explodes
- This has to be the greatest scene of universal adoration anywhere recorded
- The four living creatures and the 24 elders don't even wait for the scroll to be unrolled
- It is important to notice that the praise expands from there with a cascading, intensifying effect which involves the entire universe
- Notice these 3 concentric circles of worship in chapter 5:
 - Vs. 8-10 – innermost circle of heavenly citizens (4 living creatures and 24 elders)
 - Vs. 11-12 – 2nd circle (4 living creatures, 24 elders, and myriads and myriads of angels)
 - Vs. 13-14 – 3rd circle (everything in heaven, on earth, under earth, and on the sea)
- This worship is gradually expansive, eventually encompassing an unbroken pantheon of praise coming from the entirety of the created realm
- It is the Gospel work of Jesus Christ that is the focus of this gradually expanding chorus of praise which erupts in heaven
- Notice that the Lamb is the theme of these 3 songs:
 - Vs. 8-10 ~ 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. 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. “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

- Vs. 11-12 ~ 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, 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.”
- Vs. 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.”

- This is an implicit statement of the deity of Christ
- Nowhere in the Revelation does John say that Jesus is God; however, in Revelation 4-5, it becomes very obvious that He is God
- In chapter four, the four living creatures and the 24 elders worship God the Father (Rev 4:7-11)
- But, in chapter five, the four living creatures and 24 elders worship the Lamb (Rev 5:8-9)
- John affirms the deity of the Lamb by showing that He receives the same worship as the Father
- In fact, in Revelation 5:13, God and the Lamb are worshipped together: Rev 5:13 ~ 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.”

Revelation 5:8 ~ 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.

- The Gospel-focus of this scene is evident in the fact that they worship the “Lamb”
- There is much OT imagery here as lambs were the primary animal used for sacrifices
- The word “lamb” (*arnion*) refers to a little lamb or a pet lamb
- The imagery here derives from the Passover when Jewish families were required to keep the sacrificial lamb as a household pet for four days before sacrificing it as a means of covering their sin
- Every lamb sacrificed under the Old Covenant pointed toward Christ
- Perhaps there is no other term that better captures who Christ is and what He came to do than a “lamb”
 - Christ is referred to as a lamb only once in the OT (Isaiah 53:7)
 - He is referred to as a lamb four times in the NT outside of Revelation (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet 1:19)
 - In Revelation, He appears as the Lamb 31 times
- Heavenly worship is fueled by a deep awareness of Christ’s sacrifice
- The “golden bowls of incense...are the prayers of the saints,” likely a reference to the prayers offered by the saints for the coming of the consummation of all things in Christ
- Just as incense was offered in the temple as a sweet aroma to the Lord, so too do the prayers of the redeemed rise to the Lord as a sweet aroma
- “Here in heaven the importance of prayer in the earthly scene is inferred...The role of the elders seems to be one of sympathetic presentation not that of a mediator of earthly prayers.”²

Revelation 5:9-10 ~ 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.”

- This “new song” is in response to fresh expressions of redemption
- The OT is filled with references to a new song that flows from a heart that has experienced God’s redemption or deliverance (Ps 33:3; 96:1; 144:9)

² John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 117.

- This new song anticipates the final, glorious redemption that God is about to begin as He ushers in the end of the age
- They praise the Lamb for four specific reasons:
 1. He was “slain”
 - This is a reference to Christ’s substitutionary death for sin, absorbing the full weight of God’s wrath against sin (cf. Isaiah 53)
 2. He “purchased” sinners
 - Although we were held captive in the marketplace of sin, Christ purchased (*agorazo*) us in order to set us free
 - He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col 1:13)
 - He did this “for God,” not for us; salvation is not primarily for us, but for Him
 - While we get the benefits of salvation (forgiveness, joy, hope, heaven, no wrath/condemnation), ultimately salvation is for God
 - We are not saved for ourselves but for Him so that He gets the credit and glory for redeeming us
 - He saved us “with Your blood,” the purchase price of our salvation
 - This is a metaphor for Christ’s death

- Was it the actual blood of Jesus, the liquid, that saves?
- Some have suggested that Jesus had divine blood, the blood of God, and for that reason it saves
- Others believe that there’s something magical in the blood, something in the blood itself that washes away sins
- The Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation holds that the cup is turned into blood and, when it is drunk, it ministers grace
- But it is not the actual liquid that cleanses us from our sins
- Christ’s physical blood had no mystical saving quality to it; there is nothing in the actual blood that is efficacious for sin
- The shedding of blood is a metaphor for death (Heb 9:22)

- Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient to save “men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation”
- These are all synonyms that refer to the far-reaching sufficiency of Christ’s atoning sacrifice
- Not one nation or people group is left outside the boundaries of this ransom
- This does not teach universal salvation for all mankind
- Nor does it teach an unlimited atonement as if all men are savable in potentiality
- The text does not say: “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood...**every** tribe and tongue and people and nation.”
- It says: “you purchased for God with Your blood men **from** every tribe and tongue and people and nation”
- That speaks of a definite atonement; Christ actually saved some from every nation of the earth
- Christ died for all without distinction, not all without exception
- His sacrifice actually resulted in the salvation of people from every corner of the earth
- Christ’s work on the cross did not merely make salvation possible for all, it actually saved some

- He died not to make men redeemable but to effectually redeem them
- “If some of those for whom atonement was made and redemption wrought perish eternally, then the atonement is not itself efficacious.” (Murray)

3. He makes the redeemed a “kingdom and priests”

- The end result of our redemption is not just having our sins forgiven and getting to go to heaven forever but also becoming part of God’s kingdom and having complete access to God’s presence

4. He promises that the redeemed will “reign upon the earth”

- This will take place during the Millennial kingdom (cf. Rev 20:6)

- The worship that occurs in heaven is Gospel-saturated... worship that occurs on earth should be the same
- The emphasis should be not on what we are going to do for God, but what God in Christ has already done for us

It is Corporately-Expressed

Revelation 5:11-12 ~ 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, 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.”

- Added to the heavenly chorus in this ever-expanding group is a multitude of angels
- John describes their number as “myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands”
- “myriad” is the highest number for which the Greeks had a word; thus, the phrase “myriads and myriads” describes an uncountable number of angels

Revelation 5:13-14 ~ 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.” And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

- Here heavenly worship reaches its crescendo as all the created order in the entire universe engages in the worship of God and the Lamb
- This worship is gradually expansive, growing in number such that it becomes cosmic worship, involving all those in the universe
- This worship is corporate and congregational
- True worship is, at its core, inherently communal and corporate
- The core of our faith is expressed not as individuals, but as a body because God is most glorified when His worship is most public
- Implication: This is important for us to understand because there has been such an emphasis on the need for a personal relationship with God, but this has also spawned an emphasis on individual worship
- An unintended consequence of this has been the minimization of corporate public worship
- Many today view corporate worship as something that aids their private worship rather than their private worship aiding their public worship
- That’s why what takes place Sunday mornings is so important
- We are bound together by the crucified Christ and we are to worship in first person plural