

## Chapter 5

In this chapter we do not have a change in scenery. We still find ourselves before the throne of God with the living creatures and the twenty-four elders. All of a sudden though John sees a scroll in the Father's right hand with seven seals. It is a scroll with words written on both sides of the papyrus indicating that it is a large scroll with many words. An angel proclaims in a loud voice echoing throughout heaven "who is worthy to open the scroll?" There is a dramatic pause that ensues as all look around and examine themselves and each other as they consider the question. It is at this point that John is consumed with his own inability to open the scroll. We see that John weeps about not being able to open the scroll and by the context we understand that he doesn't just shed a single tear. He is deeply upset as he is faced with his own mortality before the holiness of the throne of God. It is at this point that one of the Elders comforts John and tells him not to weep because here comes someone who can break the seals. The elder describes him to John by saying that he is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David, who has conquered. I imagine John turning to look for the exalted and glorified King only to find a little bloody lamb walking toward the Father and taking it from His hand. Of course John knew Jesus as the Lamb of God but he must have been perplexed to see the lamb actually standing before him.

Just as we see the worship of the Father on the throne in chapter 4 we see the worship of the Lamb in chapter 5. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are just as enthusiastic about worshiping the Lamb as they were about worshiping the Father which reiterates Jesus' divinity and equality with the Father. Now we have a scene in heaven with the Father on the throne, the Spirit represented in the torches before the throne, and the Lamb of God now joins the trinitarian stage of heaven. The timing of this scene is interesting to think about because often we assume that this scene is a picture in heaven that will take place in the future with all of the saints worshiping around the throne. All saints will worship around the throne, but this is much more literally the enthronement and coronation of the Lord Jesus Christ. This scene is understood to be the ascension of Christ and the recognition of the Father that the Son has achieved the right to rule, to reign, and to open the scroll. They were not waiting in heaven for John to be caught up and witness this momentous occasion so it is most likely a previous representation of Christ receiving His place at the right hand of the Father. Whether this was an exact replay of what happened after the ascension or not we are unsure, but we do know that God was communicating with John and with us that the 1) the Lion is the Lamb and the Lamb is the Lion 2) The future of the world has been rescued by the Lord Jesus Christ because of His sinless sacrificial death and resurrection 3) The rest of the story is able to be fulfilled as it has been written because of His victory 4) Jesus is worthy to be praised!

**V.1-7** We get the idea that the scroll in chapter 5 is extremely significant because we find it in the right hand of God and the extensiveness of its writings. We also understand its importance from the limitation that is described that there are only certain individuals who may open it. Many commentators believe that this scroll is representative of the title deed to the earth. When Adam and Eve sinned, the earth was forfeited to Satan and he became the god of this world. This is verified several times in Scripture and is demonstrated in Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world if He will bow down and worship him and Jesus doesn't argue with him and say that he doesn't have the right to offer that. He simply replies with the fact that we are to worship the Lord God only. We will see in the coming chapters exactly what is contained in this scroll but we should not miss the importance of it or

the understanding that God is both unable to justly save His children and destroy Satan and judge His enemies without it being opened. The opening of this scroll brings much pain and heartache to the world and God's enemies but it is the ultimate salvation of His people. The end of the story cannot be finished without the opening of the scroll. As we will see with the breaking of the seals, we should understand that they are most likely contained within the scroll at appropriate places and not all on the outside of the scroll. Imagine a rolled-up piece of papyrus that has one seal on the outside and when that is opened then a few pages can be read until you come to another seal inside the scroll and so on.

The angel who asks about opening the scroll is described as mighty and powerful. We get the impression that the question is being asked not only of those in heaven but of those on earth and beyond as well. John's realization is that none can open the scroll and he is consumed with grief at his own inability to open the scroll as one of the Apostles of the Lord Jesus. We are led to believe that there is at least a moment of time lapse here because John's realization is that no one is found worthy. I doubt there was a game of hide and seek or anything similar but John somehow whether it is intuitive or not - knows that no one can do it. None are righteous not even one. All of our works are as filthy rags before Him. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Even the living creatures, the elders, and any other mighty angels are unable to open the scroll or even look in it. This is the Gospel story of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as no man is able to be saved of his own work or merit there is none worthy to unveil the end of history no matter how holy, how great, how notable, how anointed, how close to God. There is none but the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the very Lamb who was slain. We are meant to know several things about the one who is able to take the scroll. First, we recognize the innocence of the lamb which reminds us of the Passover Lamb whose blood covers our sins. Second, we notice that it is a lamb that has been wounded. This lamb has not escaped without suffering and in fact it is described as slain or we may think of slaughtered. This lamb was completely innocent and it was sheared, mistreated, abused, neglected, and killed for no purpose or valid reason. Thirdly, we see that even though this lamb has been slain somehow it is alive and vigorously able to grasp the scroll and finish the work of the Father. This lamb is no ordinary lamb and upon further description we see the power of it described by its horns and its omniscience described by its eyes. This is the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ who is both the Lion and the Lamb. As John is reminded by one of the elders – weep no more. Do no pity in your sin or be in despair about the end of history it has been accomplished and finished. This same lamb that we have been describing is first identified as authoritatively the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David. These are both powerful and kingly titles given of the Messiah and proven to be His by the ability to open the seals. Jesus, since His decision to submit to the Father's will at the incarnation, has been both the Lion and the Lamb and He will be forevermore. He will not be returning to His pre incarnate state before the foundation of the world, but will rule and reign for all eternity as the exalted and glorified Son of Man, who is both the Lion and the Lamb.

In order for us to fully understand the end of human history and the message and book of Revelation it is vital for us to know both of these representations of Jesus. Without understanding Jesus as the Lion, we are prone to succumb to a weak and passive Jesus who is unwilling or unable to deal with sin or His enemies. Without understanding Jesus as the Lamb, we may forget His unparalleled humility and sacrifice as we see His justice and wrath being released on the earth. As we walk through the book of Revelation, we will become acquainted with the just Lion who brings vengeance on His enemies. In Isaiah 63:1-6 we see the foretelling

of some of these events where Jesus identifies through the words of Isaiah “I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me.” The judgments of the book of Revelation and the saving of the elect are a divine work of the Lion and the Lamb that could be completed by no one else. In the Gospels we see the saving of the world and in Revelation we see the destruction of His enemies.

**V.8-14** When the Lamb takes the scroll there is a response that is similar to what we saw in chapter 4. Again, this is the same scene from chapter 4 and the same living creatures that are worshiping the Father on the throne night and day and the twenty-four elders that are prostrating themselves and casting their crowns are now fixing their gaze on the Lamb. They are recorded as all falling down before the Lamb. They are also described as holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense containing the prayers of the saints. Although we see the proverbial harp being held by the elders to worship the lamb we should not presume that everyone in heaven will be carrying around harps in heaven any more than we would expect them to be carrying around bowls of incense. These prayers of the saints are expressed here before the opening of the first seal and then also mentioned again at the opening of the final seal (Rev. 8:1-5) This is a vital reminder to the church that the prayers of the saints are heard by God and important to His plans. In some way He is storing the prayers of the saints to instigate and accomplish His plans in heaven. However broken, misguided, or inconsistent that our prayers may be if they are heartfelt God-honoring prayers they will be recorded and collected.

As the living creatures and elders fall down before the Lamb they begin to sing a new song. It is a new song because Jesus is new to the scene as the exalted and glorified Christ. Essentially from the creation of the living creatures and angels we can imagine that they have never stopped their worship and adoration of God. But now Jesus who was in some way present with the Father before His incarnation has returned as the victorious Savior and there is a new song that comes forth because of the new work that has been accomplished by the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity. “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.” This first chorus is characterized by describing what the Lamb has accomplished for all people from all time. His work was sufficient to provide the opportunity for salvation to all people everywhere. All who receive Jesus as Lord will be made priests in a kingdom who are reigning now and will reign in fullness at His return. The concept of the kingdom is very prevalent in the book of Revelation and we are to understand both His creation of the kingdom and the future fulfillment of the kingdom referred to throughout the book. Jesus declared that at His arrival the kingdom had come (Matthew 3:2, 4:17, Mark 1:15) and we see throughout the New Testament that He has made us a kingdom of priests and a holy people. In this understanding of the kingdom, we look forward to His fulfillment of it after His coming but understand that there has been an establishment of it at His incarnation, a securing of it at His death and resurrection, and a completion and fulfillment of it upon His return. It was and is and will be His kingdom - it is His kingdom now and not yet complete as well.

After this first chorus of the living creatures and the elders we hear a myriad of angels who were not heard in Revelation 4. In some way we see a greater fulfillment before the throne with the Father and the Son present. Certainly, nothing was missing before the Son’s arrival but now the throne room is fuller still. The millions and millions of angels are heard aloud “Worthy is the

Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

The context of John's vision or presence in the throne room of heaven is not the priority or the focus of this text, but it is still important for us to consider when John is before the throne and what occasion he is witnessing. Again, the primary point is the worship of the Lamb and all faithful saints and angels will join in the heavenly chorus at some point, but what is John seeing? The two most likely options that have been considered by commentators and scholars are the rapture of the church and the coronation of Jesus after His ascension. Without condemning other's views on this non-essential matter let me present some questions and possibilities. In chapter 4 the only witnesses that we see are God, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders. Now in chapter 5 we see the Lamb and also now a myriad of angels who join the heavenly chorus and then in the next chorus John says that "he heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying". He also mentions every tribe and language and people and nation in the heavenly chorus but he doesn't indicate that he sees or hears them until they are included in chorus 3 of the entire earth. For clarification in this chapter, we see three choruses – #1 is the new song by the four living creatures and the elders (v.9-10) #2 is the chorus that includes the myriads of angels (v.12) and #3 is the chorus of the entire earth (v.13). My question would then be how could this be John witnessing the rapture of the church if the saints, church, or people are not part of the choruses until all of creation? We see a myriad of angels worshipping for the 2<sup>nd</sup> chorus not a sea of people. I do not assume this to be conclusive of this discussion but it does provide food for thought about what John is witnessing. The other question that arises though if you assume that John is witnessing the enthronement and coronation of Christ is how does he hear every creature in heaven and on earth in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chorus? Certainly, this could only be possible at some world altering event where heaven and earth become one in a unique way. Because God is not limited in His understanding of time and His ability to convey it, I wondered if it is possible that we are actually seeing three simultaneous events in John's eyes and ears that are actually different time streams humanly speaking. In this scenario the first chorus would be John seeing the past event of the ascension and coronation of Jesus. The second chorus would be the present scene of heaven with the myriads of angels worshipping God and the Lamb and the third chorus would be the future scene of the entire earth worshipping the one who sits on the throne and the lamb at His second coming. Honestly, it is inconsequential when John is viewing these scenes and when they take place because it is most important for us to understand Revelation as fulfilled, being fulfilled, and will be completely fulfilled. It is the life we live as Christians – Jesus has defeated sin, He is defeating sin, and He will completely defeat sin at His return. The kingdom has come, the kingdom is coming, and the kingdom will come.

Let me close this chapter's discussion with the appropriate focus on our worship of the Lamb. As I mentioned last chapter - worship in heaven is not described as a spectator sport. Participation is voluntary, unanimous, and active in the worship around the throne. It is another appropriate reminder to consider our worship in light of eternity and the picture of heaven that is described for our consideration. The Father is worthy for He created all things and by His will they exist and have their being. The Son is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because He was slain and by His blood He ransomed people for God. As every creature in heaven and earth resounds "to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"