

# Worship in Revelation

## PART 3 • LAMB OF GOD • REVELATION 5:1-10

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It is good to be together this morning! As usual, I hope all of you have the elements for the Lord's Supper, as John/Aaron will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper right after we study together this morning. And then, Michael/John will be leading in several songs before we dismiss [for class].

Before we get to our study of God's word today, we want to make sure that we at least briefly explain God's plan of salvation. The gospel is the good news concerning Jesus and his death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We obey the gospel by believing it, by turning away from sin, by publicly confessing our belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be immersed with the Lord in the act of baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins.

And once again, we do have an example this morning. Last Sunday, Jasper obeyed the gospel over in Lira, Uganda. Uganda is on the equator in Africa, just west of Kenya. They posted online a few days ago and said, "God has added Jasper to the church of Christ in Lira. Glory back to Him." We are thankful, then for this new brother, we are looking forward to meeting Jasper someday, and we share this today by way of encouragement: What Jasper has done last Sunday, you can do today. If you have any questions, if you would like to study further, please pull me aside after worship today; or, get in touch with John or Aaron. Our contact information is always on the front of the bulletin each week (on the wall right inside the front door).

This morning, we are continuing in our brief series of lessons where we are focusing on worship in Revelation 4-5. We are looking at a series of what might be described as "songs" or maybe "statements of praise" in these two chapters. As we have learned over the past two weeks, the book of Revelation has some terrifying images, and yet the Lord does not start with those images, but he starts (in Revelation 1) by revealing himself to John (who is in prison on the Roman prison island of Patmos), he then gives a series of messages to seven congregations in Asia Minor (in Chapters 2-3), and then (in Chapter 4), the Lord invites John to step through an open door into heaven, which he does. Two weeks ago, John steps into God's throne room, and he sees the four living creatures praising God continually, saying, **"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."** God, then, is **"holy"** in every way.

Last week, we came to a second statement of praise, and the twenty four elders join in on this one. They cast their crowns before the throne in worship, as they say, **"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory**

***and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”***

Last week, then, we learned something about God as our Creator. As our Creator, he is worthy of worship. He deserves everything we have to offer.

This morning, we cross over into Revelation 5, and we come to a third statement of praise, and this is the first one that is specifically referred to as being a ***“song.”*** And this is also the first one where we are included, at least in some sense. I hope we will keep an eye out for that as we look at this passage. We have described what happens in these two chapters as “an avalanche of praise,” as something of a “crescendo” or “cascade,” as more and more voices join this praise around the throne – starting with the four living creatures, and building to the point where all of creation joins in (by the end of Chapter 5). For now, we are in the middle of it. And as we have reminded ourselves the past few weeks: This is a message we need to hear! Thankfully, we are not being persecuted to the extent they were back in the mid-90’s AD, and yet, things are still not right in this world. It is easy to get distracted by the cares and concerns of this life, and so we need the reminder that worship is important. And we need the reminder that when we worship, we join in on a behind-the-scenes reality.

This morning, then, we come to Revelation 5:1-10. I would encourage you to follow along in your own copy of the Bible. We will put the text on the wall as we look at it together, but then we will come back to the mountains up here as we move through it. As we start, though, let’s look together at Revelation 5:1-10. The words of the apostle John in Revelation 5:1-10,

***<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. <sup>4</sup> Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; <sup>5</sup> 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.” <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”***

As we look at this third example of worship in Revelation 4-5, as we have done over the past two weeks, I’d like to divide our thoughts into two basic categories, starting with what John SEES on this occasion (what is happening here, the setting), and then we will move along to what John HEARS around the throne (the statement of praise offered by the elders and the four living creatures down in verses 9-10).

#### **I. But we start with what he SEES on this occasion.**

And what he sees is a huge problem. On one hand, he sees the One on the throne holding a scroll (or a book), and this scroll is written on the inside and on the back. Normally, scrolls were only written on the inside. This

one, though, had writing on the inside and the outside, indicating that this scroll is comprehensive. This scroll is completely full. I think of a class in college where the professor would allow us a cheat sheet – everything we could fit on a 3x5 card. As you can imagine, that card was covered with micro-print on the front and the back. This scroll, then, in a similar way, was covered on the inside and out. It was full of important information.

But we also find that it is sealed with seven seals. Today, we use seals for legal documents, to prove authenticity. We might imagine going to an attorney to draft a will or power of attorney for some reason. Often, that attorney will press his or her seal into the paper somewhere near the signature, indicating that this is an original document. In my work as an election official, we have all kinds of seals – for the machines themselves, for the ballot boxes, and heavy-duty plastic bags with their own seals for the ballots and sensitive paperwork at the end of the night.

In the ancient world, instead of using stamps or stickers or envelopes as we do today, documents were sealed with melted wax, and the sender would press his signet ring into the hot wax, a seal of authenticity, and the only person allowed to break that seal would be the intended recipient. The scroll in Revelation 5, though, is sealed with seven seals, indicating that it was completely sealed, with a severe penalty on anyone who opens it without having the proper authority. Several years ago, somebody got me a kit for sealing letters like that. You melt the wax and use the seal with an “E” on it. In the ancient world, kings and government officials had special rings for this. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, you might remember how the Father in that story gave his “ring” to the son who came back home. He was restoring his son’s authority in the family, a bit like giving him the family debit card. Several days ago, I was with my mom at Home Depot. We both had a few items. She went first in line, and right as she stepped up to the register, she got a phone call, handed me her credit card and left. So here I am standing in Home Depot with my mom’s credit card. What a temptation! Practically within arm’s reach of all of these Milwaukee tools. What a responsibility! But that’s the importance of a seal in the ancient world. The seal was a symbol of your identity.

John, though, he sees this sealed scroll, and he starts weeping, because he realizes that nobody is worthy to break those seals. In verse 3, there’s nobody, ***“in heaven, on the earth, or under the earth.”*** The angel has exhausted all options, and nobody is able to open it – not Abraham, not Moses, not David, not the apostle Paul, no angels, no creatures, nobody. It’s a valuable message, it’s obviously an important message, but nobody is qualified to open it. Today, we might think about something that’s encrypted. There’s this important file we need to access, but nobody has the password. I’m thinking about the story that came out a year or so ago, of a German programmer based in San Francisco, who lost his password to access 7002 bitcoin. Bitcoin, of course, is a digital currency. I plugged it in yesterday, and 7002 bitcoin are currently worth more than \$430 million! But without the password, the value is zero! So, maybe in a similar way, John sees this scroll with the seven seals, it’s a message from the throne of God, perhaps intended to encourage these seven churches through a time of intense persecution, but no one is qualified to break those seals, so John starts weeping.

However, as he weeps uncontrollably, he hears a voice, it’s one of the elders, ***“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.”*** These are pictures from the Old Testament, where the Messiah is pictured as a Lion. And certainly a ferocious lion would fit in with the imagery we’ve already seen in this book – a powerful creature, with teeth, and claws, and great speed, and so on. We then have the reference to the Root of David, going back to another prophecy comparing the coming Messiah to King David, with King David being a powerful leader. So, we have this announcement that someone qualified has been found who can rip open these seals.

When John turns to look, though, instead of seeing a powerful lion, instead of seeing a mighty warrior like King David, he instead sees a Lamb – and not just a lamb, but a **“little lamb,”** the kind of lamb you might have as a pet for a little while. He is expecting a ferocious lion, but he looks and he sees this little lamb. Of course, this lamb is rather unusual, standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes. I’m assuming the seven horns refer to power of some kind. The seven eyes perhaps refer to wisdom or vision. But the key here is that the Lamb is standing, yet it looks as if it has been slain. The word John uses for **“slain”** in this passage is only used of Jesus in Revelation, and also in 1 John, with reference to Cain who **“slew”** his brother. It’s the word for “slaughter.” This lamb didn’t just die, he wasn’t just killed, but he was “slaughtered,” a violent act. And what we get out of this is that the mortal wounds are obvious. One commentary reminds us that the wounds on this Lamb are the only things “man-made” in heaven. What a reminder! We think of the Lord’s resurrected body in the gospel accounts. The disciples recognized the Lord, not by his face, or his height, or his weight, but by his scars, by the marks in his hands, in his feet, and in his side. In the same way, this lamb should be dead, but it is obviously alive.

Now, to these early Christians who are hearing this message read publicly for the first time, I can almost imagine them breaking out in praise right there in the assembly, “Yes! It’s Jesus! Jesus is the one who is worthy to break the seals!” Jesus is the Lamb of God. He was killed, and yet he is still standing! He is the Lamb, standing as if slain. He is no longer in a manger, or on a ship in a storm, or on the cross, or in the tomb, but he is standing in heaven, and he is all-powerful. It is a paradox. He appears to be weak, but he is strong. He is a lion, but he is also a Lamb. What a contrast! A lion and a lamb. A lamb standing as if slain. He has the appearance of weakness, but his death on the cross was the most powerful demonstration of his power. They even mocked him (in Matthew 27:40), **“If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”** The paradox is: He was more than able to come down from the cross, but he chose not to. That is true power! And so, here in Revelation 5, we are introduced to Jesus as the Lamb of God.

And this seems to be intended to encourage those early Christians: Just because things don’t seem to be going your way right now, doesn’t mean that God doesn’t have something else much better going on behind the scenes. Things are not always as they seem. Rome seems to be overpowering the church at the moment, but that does not mean that Rome will win in the end. Jesus offered himself up for us on the cross, but he is now standing and ruling in heaven. So, the message is: Hang in there! Do not give up!

And as these seals are broken throughout the next several chapters in Revelation, we find that the Lamb is far stronger than anybody could have imagined. In fact, you might want to flip over briefly to Revelation 6:16. After the breaking of Seal #6, we find that the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders of the rich and the strong were all hiding themselves in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. The tables had turned! Instead of God’s people hiding, now the mighty are hiding, and notice (Revelation 6:16-17), these mighty men **“...said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”** The most powerful men in the world were hiding from the **“wrath of the Lamb.”** When has anyone ever hid from the wrath of a lamb? I’ve been to the Wisconsin Sheep and Wool Festival over in Jefferson County for several years now, and I can tell you: Nobody is scared of the lambs! They have newborn lambs over there, and little children come up and pet those lambs. I’m trying to imagine Seal Team Six storming a compound somewhere and turning around in terror, calling back to their commanding officer, “Sir, we need to abort this mission right now! There is a terrifying little lamb standing in the way! We need to get out of here immediately!” And yet that is what happens in Revelation. As the Lamb of God, Jesus has the power not only to terrify armies, but also to break those seals.

And so, in terms of what John sees, he sees a scroll with seven seals, and then he sees a Lamb who is worthy to break those seals...

## II. ...and this brings us to what John HEARS, as he hears A NEW SONG.

Once again, the twenty-four elders fall down in worship, but now, instead of worshiping the One who sits on the throne, they fall down before the Lamb. In other words, the Lamb is worthy of worship. We know this. We know that Jesus is God. But there are some religious groups today who deny this. Some today teach that Jesus is merely an angel, that Jesus is one of God's messengers. And yet, this passage reminds us that the Lamb is also worthy of worship. The parallels between Chapters 4-5 are stunning. The Lamb is worshiped (in Chapter 5) just as the Father is worshiped (in Chapter 4).

As they fall down in worship, the elders are holding harps and bowls. I didn't realize this until studying this passage again this week, but harps are perhaps symbolic of prophecy. In 1 Samuel 10:5 and 1 Chronicles 25:3, several prophets are said to have prophesied using harps. And then we have bowls of incense, with that incense representing the prayers of the saints. And that's where we fit into this scene. When we pray, our prayers are pictured as incense, rising from these bowls into God's throne room. Here on this earth, sometimes we wonder whether our prayers are getting heard – especially during difficult times. We wonder: Is God really listening? But here, our prayers are described as incense. And if you have used incense, you know that incense has a way of filling the whole room. Incense is rather hard to ignore! In the same way, our prayers are pictured as incense. Sometimes I try to picture this in my mind as I pray, and I would invite you to do the same. What a comfort this would have been to the early Christians, praying in caves and hiding in the hills, to know that their prayers were ascending into the throne room of God!

And with this, John tells us that the elders ***"sing a new song."*** This is a new song to fit the occasion, and in this song, they praise the Lamb for being worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals. And the reason the Lamb is worthy is because ***"you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God."*** We know what it means to pay a ransom, don't we? Right now in Haiti, we have people demanding a ransom of \$1 million each for a group of 17 missionaries who went down there to rebuild an orphanage after the earthquake back in August. To pay a ransom is to make an exchange. And in Revelation 5:9, the elders are praising the Lamb for being worthy to break the seals, because he has ransomed us for God. Through his sacrifice, the Lamb has purchased our freedom, his life for ours; an exchange was made; a ransom was paid.

And in the rest of verse 9, we find that the Lamb has ***"...ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."*** And how encouraging this must have been! As these people in Asia Minor were being persecuted, they probably felt all alone, cut off, not knowing what was happening elsewhere. And here, they have the reminder that they are part of a much larger fellowship. As God's people, we are never truly alone, but we are a small part of a much larger picture. I remember growing up in the Chicago area, at a rather small congregation. And I remember how encouraging it was to occasionally get together with other congregations from time to time. And then, how encouraging it was to go to school in Tennessee and to worship with thousands of others. What a blessing that was, to realize that we are part of a much larger group. And then to also realize that God's kingdom truly includes those from ***"every tribe and language and people and nation."***

I remember traveling to Montreal a number of years ago to help reach out to the community. On the Sunday we were there, the church worshiped together in three languages: in English, in French, and in Twi [CHWEE], a

dialect spoken by the Ashanti people in Ghana. We went back and forth between those three languages – prayers, and songs, and even the sermon in three languages. What a blessing! We are not alone, and there will be people in heaven from ***“every tribe and language and people and nation.”*** This is the fulfillment of the Great Commission, where the Lord commanded his disciples to preach the gospel and to make disciples as they traveled to all nations. The Lamb’s offer of salvation, the Lamb’s ransom, can be redeemed anywhere, wherever people are willing to accept it, and it crosses all language and ethnic boundaries.

I don’t know whether we’ve thought about this, but in a sense, I have more in common with a Christian in Afghanistan than I do with my non-Christian next-door neighbor. If I have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and if a man in Uganda has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, then that means that we are serving side-by-side in God’s kingdom. As much as I love this country, my identity is not primarily as an American, but I identify primarily as a Christian. I am a citizen in the kingdom of God. And we praise God for this. The Lamb has redeemed people from every tribe, and language, and people, and nation.

In the last part of this (in verse 10), the elders praise the Lamb, ***“[for] you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”*** As the redeemed, we serve as kings and as priests. We are a part of his kingdom on this earth, and we are priests; that is, we not only have access to God ourselves, but we also point others in his direction, we are go-betweens. We think of what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:9-10, when he said, ***“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.”***

### **Conclusion:**

John, then, steps through this open door into heaven, he sees God praised as being HOLY, God is praised as being our CREATOR, and now the focus has shifted to Jesus who appears as a LAMB. This Lamb, standing as if slaughtered, is worshiped for having ransomed people from every tribe and language and people and nation, making us to be both a kingdom and priests to God on this earth.

So what? What does this mean for us gathered together here this morning in Wisconsin’s capital city, nearly 2000 years later? This passage reminds us that’s Jesus, as the Lamb of God, is completely worthy of our worship. In just a few moments, we plan on singing three songs. The first two we’ll be singing directly to Jesus as the Lamb, and the third song is about Jesus as our King. He is worthy of this worship. And, then, the other lesson here is: Even when life seems to fall apart all around us, God hears our prayers. Our prayers ascend as incense into the throne room of God.

We will leave it here for today, and hopefully next week we can pick up with the next few verses next week, as we continue looking at these songs in Revelation.

As we close our study, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for once again allowing us into your throne room this morning. We are so thankful for the opportunity to learn more about you and your Son. Thank you for reintroducing us to Jesus,

the Lion and the Lamb, the root of David, our Redeemer who has ransomed us from our sins. We are thankful for the common bond we share with others who have also been purchased with the blood of your Son. We pray that we would grow in our knowledge of you and of each other. Thank you for saving us.

We come to you this morning in the name of your Son, Jesus, who gave his life for us. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)