Worthy is the Lamb

Revelation 5:1-14

Key Verse: 5:12 “In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

 Last week in Revelation chapter 4 we learned the vision of the throne in heaven. The throne in heaven was beautiful and glorious. The one who sits on the throne was holy, Almighty Creator God who was worthy to receive glory, honor, and power. (4:11) In chapter 5 we see the vision of the Lamb who was slain. This vision is a continuation of the vision of the Throne. Now the focus of John’s vision moves from the throne to the Lamb. Today we will study who is the Lamb who was slain and why he is the only one who is worthy to open the scroll and to be praised.

 Look at verse 1. “***Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals***.” John saw a scroll in the right hand of God who sits on the throne. A scroll made of papyrus contains writings on both sides with seven seals. In general people write only on one side for public use, but they occasionally write on both sides for their privacy with a seal. The seven seals represent complete secrecy. Only the owner can break the seal and open the scroll. In ancient Israel a scroll was known as the Torah, the Old Scripture. But the scroll in the right hand of God was special with a top secret. It contains God’s plan for the future of human history. When we read chapters 6-19, there are dreadful wars against the devil and a tribulation on this earth. The scroll writes of the coming judgment of God and the return of Christ Jesus.

 Look at verses 2-4. “***And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside***.” Why did John weep over the scroll? He wept because there was no one who was worthy to open the scroll or even look inside it. John knew that the scroll contains God’s plan for this world. He knew that God would judge this world with his mighty hand and righteousness. His heart was broken when he thought about God’s righteous judgment over the world.

 While he was weeping, one of the elders said to John. “***Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals***.” (5) What great news to John! The elder said that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, triumphed and that he would open the scroll and its seven seals. The Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David are the messianic titles in the Old Testament. In Genesis 49 when Jacob blessed his twelve children, he blessed

 Judah whose descendant would be the Messiah. “*Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies…You are a lion’s cub, Judah; …Like a lion he crouches and lies down…The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet*…” (Ge 49:8-10) A lion is known as the king of animals. People watch the movie “Lion King.” The scepter is the emblem of kingship. This indicates that the Messiah would come as a king of the Jews and as a descendant of King David. As Jacob blessed Judah, God sent the Messiah Jesus as the offspring of Judah and the descendant of David.

 Look at verse 6. “***Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth***.” When John heard the elder’s message, he might have expected a roaring lion as the one who opened the scroll, but it was a lamb who was slain. A lamb is a young sheep. The lamb was slain. Being slain means being headed in the concept of the Middle East. The slain Lamb was standing at the center of the throne, surrounded by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes. The number seven symbolizes completeness and perfection. The seven horns represent mighty power and strength. The seven eyes means complete awareness and wisdom. So, the Lamb was the omnipotent, all-powerful, and omniscient, all-knowing God. The seven spirits of God, which is the Holy Spirit, was sent to this world for the Lamb.

 This Lamb who was slain reminds us of the Passover lamb, who was slaughtered to deliver the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. They took its blood and painted them on their doorposts. When the angel of God saw the blood of the lamb, he passed over. (Ex 12:13) By the blood of the lamb God purchased his people for himself and made them kingdoms and priests. (5:9,10) Prophet Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David, would become a lamb who would be slain. Isaiah 53:7 says, “*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*” John the Baptist described Jesus the Messiah as the lamb who would take away the sin of the world. (Jn 1:29).

 This Lamb who stood at the center of the throne went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. (7) What happened next when the Lamb took the scroll? Look at verse 8. “***And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people***.” The four living creatures and the elders worshiped the Lamb. Each one had a harp for music and golden bowls for worship. The golden bowls represent the prayers of God’s people. According to 6:9-11 and 8:3-5 the prayers of God’s people are their petition for God to judge the world and to extend his kingdom throughout the earth. The souls of the martyrs pleaded God to vindicate their blood from those who killed them.

 In our worship service we offer beginning prayer, representative prayer, offering prayer and benediction. I believe that all of our prayers will become pleasing aroma to God and be stored in the golden bowls of heaven. Amen. When I attended a Greek Orthodox church with my friend, I saw a priest burning incense in the middle of the service. They believe that the prayers of the saints go up to the throne of God with the smoke. Indeed, the prayers of sincere believers are pleasing aroma to God and reach to heaven. Psalm 141:2 says, “*May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice*.” When we sincerely and earnestly pray to God, our prayers become pleasing aroma to God. Prayer is not just reading our prayer requests, but sending our hearts to heaven. Our grateful, loving, compassionate, repentant, and broken hearts are pleasing aroma to God. Genesis 8:20 says that Noah sacrificed burnt offering and the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma. God was pleased with Noah’s thankful heart. Hannah’s broken-hearted prayer in the OT reached toward the throne of God and so she bore a son Samuel. Our prayer to the Lord is never in vain. All prayers will be accumulated in the golden bowls of heaven, and in God’s appointed time they will be answered. Amen!

 Look at verses 9 and 10. “***And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.***” In chapter 4 the living creatures and the elders praised the one who sits on the throne. In chapter 5 they now worship and praise the Lamb with new song. They praised the Lamb that he was worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because of three reasons. First, it is because he was slain. This means Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross. The fact that only Jesus, the Lamb of God, is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals is the same reason why Jesus is the only way for our salvation. Since Adam’s fall all have sinned and are destined to die as the price of our sins. No one is exceptional for paying the price of sin. In the Old Testament, as we studied in the book of Exodus, priests sacrificed animals every day for the atonement of their own sins and of their peoples’ sin. They had to fulfill such a bloody and complicated ceremony every day. But these were not perfect. The Hebrews ask how the blood of animals could cleanse man’s sin. So, God sent his Son Jesus as the Passover Lamb who fulfilled all requirements of our salvation through his death on the cross. Jesus was slain like a lamb as the prophet Isaiah said. Jesus became the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So, Hebrews says, “*Unlike the other high priests, he (Christ) does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself*.” (Heb 7:27) Who sacrificed his life for our sins on this earth, but Jesus? Who is qualified to save us from the wrath of God, but the Son of God?

Second, Jesus is worthy because with his blood he purchased for God his people. “*and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation*.” (9) The blood of Jesus had two main functions: 1. It cleansed all our sins. 2. It redeemed sinners from the slavery of sin. Hebrews proves these. Hebrews 9:14 says, “*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God*!” Jesus purchased his people from the slavery of sin by paying the ransom price, which was his own blood. We cannot be free from slavery by silver or gold. We cannot be free by bitcoin. We can be free only by the blood of Jesus.

Third, Jesus is worthy because he made us a kingdom and priests so that we may serve God by reigning the earth. Look at verse 10 again. “*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth*.” To become a kingdom means that we become people of God. To become priests means that we become witnesses of Jesus and shepherds for God’s sheep. Who is qualified to be praised and worshipped by us, but the one who died for our sins and made us a kingdom and priests of the world? Only the Lamb who was slain is worthy to be praised and worshiped by us. Amen!

John’s vision of the Lamb continues. Look at verses 11-12. “***Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise***!” Wow! The size of the choir suddenly multiplied ten thousands upon ten thousands times. What is ten thousands times ten thousands? It is one hundred millions. According to the Record of Guinness Book, the largest choir in the world was the gospel choir of Church of Christ in Philippine performed in May 22, 2016 with 21,262 members. But the number of the heavenly choir was one hundred million. (100,000,000) Such an enormous number of angels sang together for the Lamb who was slain in a loud voice. What a glorious and spectacular scene! Do you remember the International Bible Conference in Louisville in 2018? Around 3,000 attendants sang the Handel’s Messiah, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!” I still remember the excitement and heavenly joy when such a huge number sang together with one voice for the Lamb who was slain. How much glorious and spectacular when one hundred million angels sing together in a loud voice!

What happened next when the angels praised the Lamb and worshiped him? The whole nature of the world responded and joined the praise. Look at verse 13. “***Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!***” Now all the creatures in the universe joined heavenly worship. The choir became universal. It started from the four living creatures, then, the twenty-four elders joined. Next thousands upon thousands of angels joined. Finally, all creatures in the whole universe joined the choir. Therefore, the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb who was slain are worthy to be praised and worshiped by all creatures.

What a beautiful and glorious picture of heavenly worship! How long have all the creatures waited for this hour? Paul the Apostle said in Romans 8:19-21, “*For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed….that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*” Imagine the squirrels which are running around our backyard sing together with us, “Worthy is the Lamb”, instead of searching for food in a trash can! Imagine the cardinals which are flying over us may join our chorus, “Worthy is the Lamb.”! Imagine the moon and stars sing together at night for the Lamb of God! All creatures in the universe wait for this hour! So, let us pray that God may shorten human history for this hour! Let us earnestly pray that God’s kingdom may come on this earth as it is in heaven. Let us endure hardships, expecting that we may be members of the heavenly choir and the part of this heavenly worship. Amen!

What was the response of the living creatures to this heavenly worship? They said, “Amen!”, which means “It shall be done as you have said.” Then the elders fell down and worshiped. Let us show our response to this picture by saying, “Amen!” Surely we shall all be changed like the angel and join the heavenly worship someday! Amen!