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!”

Revelation was written by the apostle John while he was on the Island of Patmos. At that time, John was old and was experiencing persecution because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev 1:9) While John was in the Spirit, he saw a vision of Jesus (1:12-20), and heard Jesus’ message to seven neighboring churches and prophecy about what was going to take place in the future. (1:19) In chapters 2 and 3 there are letters to seven churches - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the Throne of God, the Scroll and the Lamb. Revelation is symbolic, even if John himself interpreted some parts, so we must be prayerful and careful in our interpretations. Revelation contains God’s apocalyptical message and celestial view of his kingdom. For this reason I have hesitated teaching Revelation to new believers.

Why are we suddenly studying Revelation at the beginning of this year? Revelation 5 shows us a picture of Jesus’ kingdom, which is the main topic of the coming International Summer Bible Conference, which will be held in Louisville, Kentucky on August 9-12. It also reveals to us a spectacular worship service in heaven so that our worship service also may be glorious and Christ-centered on this earth. Because of the symbolic and apocalyptical characteristics of the writing, we need the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit so that we may interpret and digest today’s passage well. Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, please pour out your Holy Spirit so that we may understand and interpret your words correctly from the beginning to the end. Amen!

First, the throne in heaven (4:1-11) Chapter 4 describes the Throne in heaven. While John was in the Spirit, God opened his eyes to see the Throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. (4:2) The one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ***“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.***” Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him and worship him. They also sang and praised the Lord the Creator God who is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power. (Rev 4:2-11)

What a beautiful and glorious picture of the Throne of God in heaven! This throne is so beautiful and glorious that any great painter on this earth and any high-tech computer cannot draw or paint its scene. I just ask you to draw a picture in your mind by the help of the Holy Spirit. In this picture of the throne, the appearance of God has the image of perfect holiness and brilliance reflected by precious stones. The twenty-four elders are the representative of all the believers in heaven, and the twelve tribes of Israel in OT and the twelve apostles in NT. Flashes of lightning and thunder are the symbols of the awesome majesty and power of God. The sea of glass is the symbol of the basin in the heavenly temple along with the seven lamps (4:5) and the altar of incense. (8:3) The four living creatures combine features of Isaiah’s seraphim and Ezekiel’s cherubim. (Isa 6:3, Ezek 1:6, 10:1). They are the chief of their species with fullness of knowledge of God and power. Their six wings represent unlimited mobility and swiftness in fulfilling God’s commands. ‘Covered with eyes’ gives us the impression of their exceeding knowledge of God and the impossibility of escape from their attention. These four living creatures are guarding the throne and leading the heavenly worship.

Our God the Lord who sat on the throne reveals his perfect holiness and awesome majesty in his feature and character. Day and night the four living creatures praised His holiness and power. Let us read verse 8. “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.*” Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to the Lord God, the twenty-four elders fall down before him and worship him and sing, “*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*” (4:11) The twenty-four elders praised the Creator God who is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power. We human beings are all God’s creatures. There is no one on this earth who was born without any purpose or reason. All were born by God’s will and with his perfect plan and design. Therefore, our God is worthy to be praised, to receive glory, honor, and power. We have many reasons to live on this earth. The most important reason for our existence is to glorify God’s name and to fulfill his will in and through our lives.

Second, the Scroll and the Lamb (5:1-14) In chapter 5 there appears another figure in the center of God’s throne, who is the Lamb. 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.***” A scroll is a long strip of leather or papyrus on which scribes wrote in columns with pen and ink. Usually the writing was on one side only, but the writing on both sides indicates the fullness of God’s word and the significance of its contents. After being rolled up, a scroll was often sealed to protect its contents. The scroll which God took on the throne was sealed with seven seals, which meant complete protection and absolute inviolability. The scroll could be opened only after all the seals were broken.

Look at verses 2,3. “***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***.” Why couldn’t anyone open the scroll? Why was the scroll only able to be opened by a worthy person? Why was opening the scroll and knowing its content important? Some scholars say that the scroll is the Torah in the Old Testament. But the Old Testaments was fulfilled by and through Jesus Christ. The scroll contains more than God’s law. It contains God’s divine plan for the future human history. The scroll contains how God would fulfill his will for the world and consummate it through Jesus Christ. In a word, it contains the destiny and future of the whole world, including salvation and the final judgment of the world. It is God’s top secret which was sealed and allowed to be opened by only the worthy one, who is co-equal, co-omnipotent, and co-omniscient with God.

In verse 4 John wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. He had compassion on those who are dying and being thrown into the burning sulfur without knowing the way of salvation. According to Dr. David Sills, around 50,000 people around the world die every day without knowing the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. While John was weeping, one of the elders said to him. Look at verse 5. “***Then one of the elders said to me, “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***.” The elder said that there is only one who is worthy to open the scroll and to reveal the secret of God’s kingdom. He is described as the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David. A lion is the symbol of a king. Remember the movie ‘Lion King.’ The worthy one is the Messiah who would come from a descendant of Judah and King David. He should triumph over all authorities, powers, and kingdoms of the world. He is Jesus Christ, who was born as a descendant of Abraham and David, and who died for our sins and rose again from the dead and conquered the power of death. Only Jesus, who triumphed over death, is worthy and able to open the scroll.

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***.” As soon as the elder’s message was over, John saw the Lamb who was standing at the center of God’s throne. The Lamb who was slain was very familiar to John. The prophet Isaiah prophesied about this lamb who would be slain for our transgressions and iniquities. He remembered the lamb who did not open his mouth when he was slaughtered. This lamb brought us healing by his wounds and peace through his death. This lamb was described by John the Baptist, who said, “*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” (Jn 1:29) John the Apostle recognized this lamb through his slain mark. He remembered the Risen Jesus who had appeared to him and showed him the nail marks in his hands and the wounds on his side. John saw the same lamb at the center of God’s throne encircled by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. The lamb at the center of the throne had a different image from the lamb who was a man of suffering and familiar with pain (Is 53:3) He was glorious and triumphant. There is no hint of darkness or death. The lamb had seven horns which mean perfect glory and power and seven eyes which mean the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth with perfect wisdom. (6) This reminds us of the Holy Spirit who would be sent forth to exalt Jesus and convict the world of sin. (Jn 14:16, 15:26, 16:7-15)

In verse 7 the lamb went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. This is the greatest moment, which reminds us of Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:18 which says, “*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*.” God the Father who sat on the throne allowed His Son Jesus Christ to open the scroll and to reveal the secret of God’s divine plan for the whole world. When the Son 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. (8)

Here we see a picture of the heavenly worship. The lamb who held the scroll stands at the center of the throne. The scroll is the word of God. The elders held harps which produce music and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. Our worship service is a copy of this heavenly worship. We have a weekly message from the word of God. We don’t have harps, but guitars and a piano, and offer music and praise before and during the service. We pray for world mission and for God’s kingdom. We bring our offerings as the expression of our faith and gratitude. We finish the service with the Lord’s Prayer.

When the lamb took the scroll, the four living creatures and the elders 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***.” (9,10) The lamb was worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because he was slain. It was because he was wounded on the cross and died for our sins. He paid the price of our sins by his own blood and we were redeemed. In the ancient days people paid a price to purchase and release slaves. We call this redemption by paying a ransom. Jesus paid his own blood to purchase us from the slavery of Satan and to rescue us from eternal punishment. His salvation reaches to all peoples of all nations. Everyone can be saved when they call on Jesus’ name. Jesus purchased us not only to redeem us, but also to make us a kingdom and priests. Jesus enabled us to serve the Lord God without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Lk 1:74) The apostle Peter said in his first letter to the saints, “*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God*…” (1 Pe 2:9,10)

Jesus is worthy to be praised, honored, and worshiped because he sacrificed his life for us. Every day we remember Jesus who was slain in order to purchase us for God. Every day we must repent of our sins and receive forgiveness for our sins. Yesterday I was struggling with anger against someone whom I loved but who betrayed me. I couldn’t forgive him when I thought about what he had done to me. It was difficult for me to forgive him. But I have to forgive him as Jesus forgave me. I decided to trust in God, and put all things into God’s hands. Jesus was slain for our sins. Jesus shed his blood for our forgiveness. Jesus is the focal point of our worship. He is the center of our life. He is the way, the truth, and the life who leads us to God in heaven. (Jn 14:6)

The company of praise in this heavenly worship kept increasing in number. Look at verses 11-14. “***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!” 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, for ever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elder fell down and worshiped***.” The praise started with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. It grew with thousands upon thousands of the angels. Finally, all creatures of the universe joined this heavenly worship and praise. Our worship and praise also should be increasing every day and every week. Our repentant topics and thankful topics should increase more and more every week. In the middle of our worship and praise should be Jesus, the Lamb of God who was slain. Let the name of Jesus be praised and honored by our lips and hearts. Let’s respond by saying, “Amen!”

This year we will have the International Summer Bible Conference with the topic, “His Kingdom”. Thousands of people around the world will gather in Kentucky and worship the Lord together. This will be a glorious and spectacular gathering. Still, this gathering will be only a rehearsal for our heavenly worship in the future. We all will join the heavenly worship with the four living creatures, the elders, and thousands of the angels by singing, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain”. Amen.