



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter 3

May 4, 2025

Worthy Is the Lamb

Revelation 5:1-14

¹ Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

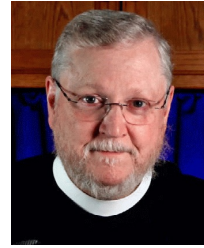
⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying,

*"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,
¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth."*

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice,

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

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,



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*“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”*

¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

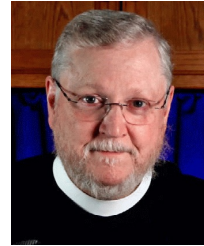
Last week, we took a close look at John’s prologue, particularly as it presented to the church and the world the exalted Christ in all His heavenly glory. I was struck by how the very appearance of the Son of Man was so overwhelming that it knocked the great apostle to the ground as though dead, yet the compassion of our Lord shone through as He touched him and bid him not to fear. What a wonderful Savior! What a loving Master we serve!

Today, as we turn to chapter five, we’re presented not only with a Lord who is both fearsome and loving, but one who is also worthy. “Worthy of what?” you may ask. That’s an interesting question. Let’s dig into the text and see what John has to say.

In verse one, John sees in the right hand of God a scroll, written on front and back, sealed with seven seals. The seals indicate that the contents of the scroll are secure; only one who is worthy can open it and reads its contents.

We’re told that a mighty angel cries out with a loud voice, saying, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or earth or under the earth was found who could do this. John says that he began to weep loudly, for surely a scroll as secure as this, held in the very hand of God, must bear good news for the people of God. But if no one can open it and read, how would we ever know its contents or receive its blessings? So John weeps out of great sadness that the words of the scroll might never be known.

What is at stake? John would have inferred that the import of the scroll weighed heavily on the destiny of God’s people. All the good God had intended for His people might never be realized if the scroll remained sealed. Someone had to break the seal. But no one was found who could. What a conundrum! It calls to mind the prophecy of Isaiah, who wrote, “The vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, ‘Read this,’ he says, ‘I cannot, for it is sealed.’ And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, ‘Read this,’ he says, ‘I cannot read.’” (Is. 29:11-12). And yet, though the hearts of the people were far from Him, giving only lip service to His commandments, preferring their own laws rather than His [Is. 29:13], God promised, “Behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder” (Is. 29:14a). If God would do such wonderful things for His disobedient people, what fantastic things did He have in mind for those He had redeemed? John feared he would never know. And so he wept.



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And here we see something interesting. Throughout the Book of Revelation, angels are the ones who guide John in understanding the events taking place before him, leading him through each vision by pointing out certain details that help to focus his attention. However, in the two visions that have the most to do with the redemption and salvation of God's people and the triumphal reign of Christ, an *elder* attends John, not an angel. Who better than a redeemed and glorified believer, who himself has gone through the suffering but is now at peace before God's holy presence, [who better] to tell John not to weep, but rather to look upon the Lamb of God? And what a privilege and honor for the elder to point John, in the midst of his tears, to the victorious Lamb who was slain, but who now lives forever! That is my privilege and honor too, beloved, to point you in the midst of your tears to the Lamb of God who has won the victory for you and for me. By the way, it is an honor and privilege which I am happy to share. You too can be the voice of one who has walked the path, who has come through suffering into the light of Christ's glory, to point some downtrodden brother or sister to Jesus, who lived and died and who lives again in victory over all our enemies (2 Cor. 1:5ff).

In introducing John to the Lamb of God, the elder makes him aware of this one's right and power to open the scroll. Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David. These titles indicate that He is the Messiah, the one long promised to rescue mankind from the curse brought about by Adam and Eve in the Garden. The Messiah was prophesied to come through the line of Judah. David, a descendant in that line, was the greatest king Israel ever knew. The lion was the Jewish apocalyptic sign of Messiah. This one, this Lamb of God, is that Lion, and is also the everlasting shoot from the Root of David, a King who would rule over Israel in wisdom and righteousness, judging sinners, but at the same time gathering God's people and leading them in righteousness.

He has the right, power, and authority to break the seals of the scroll because He has risen from the dead. St. Peter acknowledges this in his Pentecost sermon. St. Paul mentions it in his letter to the Romans and his second letter to Timothy. And now John, in the vision of Christ's enthronement, is introduced to the victorious Lamb as the fulfillment of these two great messianic titles: the Lion of Judah and the Root of David.

This Lamb has conquered death and hell. He was slain, but He has risen. This is the ultimate victory. No other ruler, no other religious figure, can claim this of himself. Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC, but two years later, when he was acclaimed as a god by the Roman Senate, he was still dead. Sun Myung Moon declared himself to be the second coming of Christ, but died in 2012 – and is still dead. David Koresh, Jim Jones, Jeffrey Don Lundgren, Ervil LeBaron, Roch Theriault – these are just a few of those over the years who claimed they were the Messiah. But guess what? All dead. Of the grand parade of self-proclaimed Messiahs throughout the centuries, all of them are dead. Only



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one so designated has proven that the title is justified. And He did so by rising from the grave, victorious over sin, death, and hell. Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, the Fairest of Ten Thousand, the Bright and Morning Star, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, burst forth from His tomb in triumph and is even now seated on the throne of heaven ruling all things for His elect. This means you, beloved. He has conquered death for you, He ascended the throne for you, He is ruling all things for you.

John mentions that this Lamb in the midst of the throne has seven horns and seven eyes. A horn – like a ram’s horn – is the Old Testament symbol of power. Seven is the number of perfection. The Lamb is therefore omnipotent – having perfect power in heaven and on earth. The seven eyes indicate that He is omniscient – He knows all things, sees all things. This Lamb, the exalted Christ, is worthy to break the seals of the scroll and reveal its contents.

John wept when no one was found worthy to open the scroll, because he sensed that its message was about the destiny of God’s people. As John will unfold beginning in the next chapter, his conjecture was true. The message of the scroll, and therefore the message of the Book of Revelation, has to do with events on earth from the time of Christ’s victory and ascension to the end of all earthly things. In other words, folks: now. The prophetic message of Revelation is about the tribulation and suffering that the human race – including the church – will experience, from the ascension of Christ right up to the end of this world. But the most important part of the message concerns Christ’s present and future reign in glory and the current faith and mission of the church in the midst of all the agony and death throes of the human race and its history. Everything we see happening in our world today – and in our church – reflects the prophecy given by God through His servant John. The apostasy – the masses leaving the church – the moral depravity, the persecution – it all resonates from this book and the revealing of the contents of the scroll.

But the ultimate purpose of Christ receiving the scroll and revealing its contents is to encourage the church and strengthen its faith in the midst of all the sufferings, that you and I may remain faithful to Christ and so attain the promise of everlasting glory. That faithfulness involves carrying out the mission Christ has given to the church.

What does that mean? Well, it means a couple of things. First of all, it means that, though Christ’s mission on earth has been completed through His death and resurrection, His mission through the church goes on until He comes again. What is that mission? To share Christ with the world. That’s our mission; in fact, it’s your mission. You’re not in this world to achieve as much pleasure as you can, to amass as much wealth as you can, simply to mark time as the years go by. This is not to say that pleasure and wealth are evil, but they are not ends in themselves. The mission of every Christian, and therefore the goal of every Christian is to live through the pleasure and pain, the wealth and poverty, in such a way that Christ is made known to the world. You are not just another random



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human being slogging your way through life; you are a Christian walking a path that leads to everlasting life, and you ought to want to take others with you. This doesn't mean you have to be a Bible thumper, but it means to live your faith openly. Don't hide your light under a bushel; let it be seen, let it be known.

Carrying out the mission Christ has given to the church also means that we keep in mind whose mission it is. It's not ours, it's His. And everything we do in the congregation and in our personal lives, we do under the lordship of Jesus Christ, for the glory of God and for the benefit of His people.

We see this reflected in the new song sung by the saints in heaven. Their praise is sung in unison, which is to say that they are singing the same praise – a praise not directed at themselves or at any one of them. Nobody there is patting themselves on the back for a job well done. They leave that to Jesus. They're giving glory to Christ – all glory to Christ. None of them were worthy to open the scroll. Not one of them could step forward to break the seals. But they all knew the one who could. And they sing His praises for all they're worth. He is the Lamb who was slain. He is the one worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might. He is the one due honor and glory and blessing! "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

Oh, beloved, let us join our voices with the four living creatures and say, "Amen!" Let us worship and bow down with the elders. Our Savior was dead and is alive. He ascended into glory and is coming back soon. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen