

Lesson # 17 Worthy is the Lamb

Revelation 5:6-10

Date: June 6, 2010

⁶And 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. ⁷And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸And 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. ⁹And 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,
¹⁰and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth."*

I. The Lamb Slain

v. 6

It provides quite a contrast as, in v. 5, John is told that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah has authority to open the scroll, and now, rather than a ferocious lion, John instead sees a Lamb standing as though slain! This is the One who will take the scroll from the Father's hand and open it, thus revealing & unleashing God's final judgment plans for earth. Some Covenant theologians (Preterists) believe this scene took place at Christ's ascension, some 1,980 years ago, but since this scene precedes what appears to be almost immediate calamity on earth (the Tribulation period), and that certainly has not occurred yet, it is my belief that this scene is yet future. ①

Even before he describes the Lamb, John tells us where he sees this Lamb – *"between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders"*. Although a lot of argument has taken place as to exactly where this means in relation to the throne and the elders and 4 Living Creatures, the simplest way to understand it is that He was standing in the midst of all the creatures (angelic & human) at the throne. When v. 7 says He "went & took the scroll", it does not have to mean that He was some distance away from the throne, only that He just moved into a position within the throne to accept the scroll from the Father's right hand.

The vision of "a Lamb as if slain" here is a very important image of the Lord Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation. He is called the Lamb 28 times in Revelation – at war, victorious, as a shepherd to His people, in wrath, even as the light in the city of New Jerusalem – the Lord of the triumphant church in glory (21:23; 22:1-5)!

Why is the image of Jesus as the Lamb so integral to Revelation? Wouldn't the image of the Lion serve God's purposes of vengeance better? Yet, what has the entire Bible, and specifically the Gospel, been preparing us for with regard to the Messiah or Christ? A Lamb – a sacrificial Lamb who, by His one time sacrifice, propitiates God's wrath against sin. Think with me about some examplesⁱ:

- Exodus 12 – the Passover Lamb – whose shed blood applied to the doorposts of the house protected Israel (or even others) within that house from the Destroyer who killed the first born of every unprotected household as God’s final plague against Egypt.
- Lev. 4:32-25 – God’s prescription of the killing of a lamb with the sinner’s hand placed on its’ head as a sin offering, where the person’s guilt is ceremoniously transferred to the lamb, who dies in the sinner’s place.
- Ex. 29:38-42; Num. 28:3-6 – daily sacrifice of 2 lambs was required to be slain on behalf of Israel as a sin offering to a Holy God
- Isaiah 53 – Isaiah’s description of God’s Servant – the vicarious sufferer who became a sin offering – being led “as a Lamb” to the slaughter.
- John 1:29,36 – John the Baptist’s famous description & introduction of Jesus when He arrives at the Jordan, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

He did not save us a lion, but as a Lamb. It is as the Lamb that He is worshipped here in this chapter in heaven as John reports (Rev. 5:9,12,13). Elsewhere, in the NT, the Greek word translated “lamb” (as here in Rev. 5:6) is “*arnion*” or “little lamb”, and is used only in John 21:15. Another word for lamb is “*amnos*”, used in the LXX (the Septuagintⁱⁱ) in Isa. 53:7 and John 1:29.

It is Christ’s death as God’s sacrificial Lamb on behalf of His Elect which alone has redemptive power which qualifies Jesus to open the scroll as the “Lamb slain”.

The combination of great, unchallenged power, “Lion of Judah” (5:5) compared to a “Lamb slain” & thus depicting the supreme self-sacrifice draws our attention to Christ’s uniqueness. This supreme sacrifice led to supreme power (Phil. 2:5-11) so that this seeming oxymoron is perfectly compatible. ②

The Lamb is seen as standing rather than the expected prone position of One slain. Apparently, the wounds are visible, but do not inhibit movement or obvious vitality, which is the result of the resurrectionⁱⁱⁱ.

John now describes the 7 horns & 7 eyes. The horn is a symbol of strength in the OT^{iv}, and is also used in the later parts of the OT to denote royal force or dignity, and is so used in Revelation as well.^v The horns which John records indicate fullness or perfection (which the number 7 often symbolizes in Scripture) of power, thus depicting the Lamb as an almighty warrior king.

The 7 eyes represent omniscient sight, intelligence & wisdom in fullness, this interpretation being confirmed by John’s explanation “*which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth*”. The Holy Spirit proceeds as much from the Father as from the Son (John 15:26), and acts as Christ’s agent to inculcate all that is going on in the world and that is one of the things this symbolic portrait is meant to convey to us.

John has identified the One who is worthy to take the scroll and described the scene for us – the events which will unfold and reveal God’s plan for the culmination of all history are about to begin – as the Lamb goes to the Father and takes the scroll from His hand.

II. The Lamb Takes the Scroll / Worship Begins vv. 7-8

Since the Lamb is already at or in the throne, He merely has to move into a suitable position to receive the scroll, although a much more dramatic, Hollywood style procession is envisioned by some. Some of that sentiment may arise from Daniel's account of what is likely the same scene – **Dan. 7:13-14**.

This giving of the scroll, because of what it contains, is really an authorization from God the Father to Christ to execute the final series of events & to begin the planned process which will seal the fate of every human being and angel alive for all eternity. The Lamb, as has been already attested by a universal search, is the only One worthy to be authorized to do this, and that, as a result of His victorious death on the cross which securely redeemed the Elect & conquered the forces of evil, death & Hades.

Some postulate that, at this time, the Lamb resumed human form, in order to take the scroll & open it, and to be seen later as the rider on the white stallion of Rev. 19. At some point, Jesus does revert to human appearance, and it is most likely here that this takes place, although it is not recorded by John.

It seems that innately, all those in heaven who are intently observing this transaction understand the critical importance of what is occurring. Remember that even John wept when it appeared that no one was worthy to take the scroll (v. 4), but look at the reaction in v. **8**. These beings are both thrilled and awestruck at the same time as Jesus' worthiness is demonstrated by the Father as He gives Him the scroll. This acceptance of the scroll by the Lamb is a significant time mark in history, because now the contents of the scroll will be made real and it is only a matter of time before the Millennial Kingdom will come and eternity in heaven will follow that. God's final, righteous judgment is at hand. ③

Action by the 4 Living Creatures & the 24 Elders is immediate – they fall down before the Lamb in an obvious attitude of intense & passionate worship. It says here that the 24 Elders held harps and golden bowls of incense.

The harp is a well documented Biblical musical instrument, which many commentators say is more akin to a guitar than the harp we envision. It is often associated with joy in the OT (I Chron. 25:1,6; II Chron. 29:25; Pss. 71:22; 92:3; 149:3); prophecy (I Sam. 10:5; I Chron. 25:3; Ps. 49:4); mostly in praise to & worship of God; and later in Rev. 14:2; 15:2, it is used to describe heavenly music.

This musical accompaniment fits well with what is about to be revealed in v. 8 – “a new song”, not a doxology being “said” as in v. 11, but a new song being sung.

The Elders are also said to be holding golden bowls of incense, and the incense is said to be “the prayers of the saints”. Golden bowls were usually associated with furnishings in the Temple – cf. Zech. 14:20, at the altar – **II Chron. 4:21-22**. It is obvious here that this incense is symbolic of prayers being offered rather than literal prayers. Our prayers do not morph into incense once we offer them up, but the symbolic sense is that our prayers are a pleasant aroma to God, an acknowledgment of His power and sovereignty, as our prayers expose our souls to change at the hands of God, whose will we are ready & willing to accept if we pray rightly for His will to be done.

Another mention of prayer related to incense is found in Rev. 8:3 and this time it is an angel who is offering up the prayer / incense at the golden altar before the throne. Some use this verse to “prove” that the elders are really angelic beings, but this verse is not a compelling argument for that position. It is not a necessity that it is only angels who can offer up incense & prayer before God in His throne room.

These prayers in v. 8 may be general prayers, but it is more likely, given the context of judgment to come & verses like 6:10 & 8:4-5, that specific prayers are in sight here, and God is using these prayers to bring about what He has decreed would take place before time began.

II. The New Song

vv. 9-10

The first thing that must be identified here is who the “they” is, as in “**They** sang a new song”. Is it the 24 Elders only, or do the 4 Living Creatures sing too? Some argue that, since the 24 Elders alone have harps (v. 8) they alone are singing. However, the Greek structure of the sentence is most likely saying that there are 28 beings singing here, not just 24 – based on the number of those who fall down and worship in v. 8 – the 4 Living Creatures & the 24 Elders.

Six times in the Psalms, a “new song” is mentioned – 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1 & in Isaiah 42:10. In Isaiah, this new song is a celebration of God’s great past deeds which will pale in comparison to His future deeds. The song in Rev. 5:9-10 rejoices in God’s redemption of His people. Note – in Rev. 4:11, if it is a song, it celebrated God’s creative work.

Notice the very first word of the song, “Worthy”. This is addressed to Jesus Christ, and mirrors the first word to the Father in Rev. 4:11. Jesus is God – He is the One who takes the scroll and puts the contents into action; thus He is the One who is sovereign & judges. He is the only One found worthy to take the scroll & open its’ seals. ④

The praise offered to Jesus is two-fold:

- *9. for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people^{vi} 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."*

This describes the payment made by Jesus personally at Calvary, and without elucidating details, includes all the events surrounding His crucifixion, including the orchestration by God to bring it about in perfect concert with the OT prophecies, types, the priesthood, the Law, the depravity & wickedness of men’s hearts and the love & grace of God. After praising Him for His worth, the reason for the praise is given as, “for You were slain”.

This could not be an aspect of worthiness, but rather of pity, if Calvary were not the plan all along. Had Jesus merely been trapped and murdered, yet God decided to use that, this would not be praiseworthy except perhaps to the Father for a good twist on this “accidental” occurrence. Yet, Jesus Himself claimed that He laid His life down of His own accord – John 10:17-18 - and in passages like Acts 2: 22-24 & 4: 27-28, along with Isaiah 53 and so many other passages demonstrate God’s intention & purpose to

use the very death of His Son He had planned from before time began to accomplish what Jesus is now being praised for.

“by your blood you ransomed people for God” – Going along with verses like **I Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; I Pet. 1:18-19** – the notion that Jesus’ death paid a redemptive price, as if redeeming a slave in a market. In fact, in a real sense, that is what we were...slaves to sin, redeemed from the curse of sin and adopted as sons & daughters! The cost to free us from the bondage of sin was Jesus’ blood, but not in the sense of some Holy Grail sort of thing. It is not the actual, physical blood of Christ (limited to 6 or 7 pints like all humans) that saves but the act of shedding that blood, resulting in His vicarious death, when He did not deserve to die. Yet, as our penal substitute (taking on our sin debt within His own body – note **II Cor. 5:21**), He purchased our justification.

“for God” – Note **I Pet. 3:18; II Tim. 2:15** – our salvation was purchased by Christ (**I Pet. 1:17-21**) in order to bring us to God, that we might serve Him & worship Him through Jesus Christ. It is amazing how often in the NT this comes up – ends of salvation sentences ending with “to the glory of God the Father” or something similar. That is not even to mention doxological verses like Rom. 11:36. Ephesians 1 & 2 are replete with phraseology that verifies without question that God the Father is the One who has masterminded the redemption along with Jesus and the Holy Spirit of course – all 3 involved in the planning – **Eph. 1:11** – yet all with different roles to play within the scheme of redemption. See also Eph. 1: 15-23 & 2:1-10.

“from every tribe and language and people and nation” – the scope of Jesus’ vicarious death is worldwide. Not every person is saved - that would be universalism - but people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation either are saved or will be. Note **I JN 2:2**.

The phrase *“from every tribe and language and people and nation”* is found 5 times in Revelation (here, 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6), but never in the same order. The expression stems from Daniel 3:4,7,29; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14. This involves all sorts of people, without distinction, not without exception. Kings, criminals, babies, slaves, princes, tax collectors, bosses, workers, fishermen, merchants, scoundrels, knights, soldiers, ministers, farmers, clerks, politicians, doctors, lawyers, students, etc.

What do these groups signify?

- “Tribe” means people of the same descent, the same clan or family, the same ancestry
- “Tongue” means people speaking the same language – this group is not confined to within borders (ie. Austrians speak German)
- “People” is the same race, same stock or interest group
- “Nation” is a group with political, cultural, and /or social peculiarities. They possess a unity around these things.

There are interesting implications to the fact that such a large cross-section of humanity is included in this group in heaven. Even in 2010, there are numerous (100’s of millions, perhaps a billion or more) people who have never heard of Jesus Christ or the gospel. If Christ returns soon, it is conceivable that they will never hear. Think of the centuries past, the remote areas of the world – the deepest jungles, the coldest polar regions, Asia, Communist Russia, Pacific Islands, Siberia, etc. – much of the world was, until the 20th century, what we would describe as uncivilized, and absolutely unevangelized. So how do people from every tribe, tongue, people & nation end up in heaven? Universalism &

inclusivism are not the answer by the way, nor is post-mortem evangelism. Acts 17:25-27 tells us that God chose where and in what era every person who would have life, would live. It is His sovereign determination who will hear the gospel and how often. Those who do not hear it, will have no hope, apart from dying as an infant to enter heaven.

However, here are some of the things God uses to get the gospel to remote areas:

- special angelic or human evangelists or missionaries (Acts 8; Gal. 1)
- continuing evangelism and missions until Christ returns
- worldwide travel & technological advances
- creative ways to spread the gospel – planes dropping pamphlets, bibles, etc.
- the prayers of God's people
- infant mortality

Another thing that speaks about God's sovereignty in bringing about this diverse group of worshippers is found in one of the "spectacular sins"^{vii}, as recorded in **Gen. 11:1-9**. It is based on this account that John Piper makes a direct connection to Rev. 5:9-10. God used the disobedience of humans way back in Genesis to bring about this scene. Back in Gen. 9, humanity was commanded to be fruitful & multiply and to fill the earth. But they did not do that. In an act of arrogant and conspiratorial rebellion, led by Nimrod, a tower & city were built to "reach to heaven" so that man could make a name for himself. Notice v. 4, "lest we be dispersed". They did not want what God wanted so they rebelled and stayed where they were.

God's solution, in vv. 6-8, was to confuse the language. There could be no continued conspiracy if no one could understand one another. People had to seek out someone who they could converse with, and once they hooked up with them, they would go their own way. Genesis 10 describes the separation of the people as they dispersed around the world, united at that time only by a common language among many languages. John Piper identifies 5 ways this act of God magnifies the glory of Christ^{viii}:

1. **Christians are Guarded**: different languages and nations hinder the rise of a single worldwide anti-Christian nation that could simply wipe out all believers. Satan comes close to doing that in the Tribulation period.
2. **Pride is destroyed**: Babel, often translated (over 200 x) in the Bible as Babylon, is a pitiful attempt to outdo God. This name Babylon given to the city of Anti-Christ in Rev. 14:8-9 is another brief attempt to overcome God with Satanic-human unity, but it too will fall short of that goal. Once this Babylon is destroyed, man's pride will be completely eradicated.
3. **Every group claimed**: the authority and power of Christ is magnified because He lays claim on every language group and people – cf. Matt. 28:18-19.
4. **The Gospel is glorified**: The gospel breaks into every language & people group. John Piper says here: "If there were no diversity of languages, if the spectacular sin of Babel had not happened with its' judgment, the global glory of the gospel of Christ would not shine as beautifully as it does in the prism of 1,000's of languages."^{ix}
5. **Jesus Praised**: The praise that Jesus receives from all the languages of the world is more beautiful than it would have been if there were only 1 language and 1 people to sing. It was this spectacular sin on the plains of Shinar (modern day Iraq) that has given rise to the multiplication of languages that ends in the most glorious praise to Christ from every language on earth.

According to **Zeph. 3:9**, there will come a time (the Millennial Kingdom) where, even though nations will still exist, God will restore one language to the earth because His people will be obedient to Him, and it will suit His purposes.

Back in Rev. 5:10, the second aspect of praise is, *“and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”* Not only has Christ made them (or “us”) a Kingdom and priests to God, but we shall also reign on the earth with Him, in the Millennial Kingdom.

Much more than just being redeemed – we are blessed, saved to the uttermost – entering His Kingdom as not only priests with full access into God’s presence to praise & worship Him, but as those who will reign with Him.

We’ll leave this lesson here at this point with a final comment, and that is to point out whose actions are involved in vv. 9-10:

- “Worthy are **You**”
- “**You** were slain”
- “**You** ransomed people for God”
- “**You** have made them a kingdom”
- “**You** have made them priests to our God”

Christ and Christ alone has saved the Elect. There is no room here for any other saviour or for human effort – it is all to Jesus we owe!

Next lesson – Lesson # 18...Rev. 5:11-14...Universal Praise

ⁱ These examples are from J.I. Packer; Mark Dever; “In My Place Condemned He Stood”; Crossway Books; 2007; pp. 150-151

ⁱⁱ LXX or The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was the version that was most prevalent in Jesus’ day since most people understood Greek.

ⁱⁱⁱ Perhaps His wounds will be visible reminders of His sacrifice for His people throughout eternity and thus, will be the only man-made things in heaven.

^{iv} Num. 23:22; Deut. 33:17; I Sam. 2:1; II Sam. 22:3; I Kings 22:11; Ps 75:4; 132:17; Dan. 7:20-21; 8:5

^v Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3,12.

^{vi} Note that the NKJV here says “us” rather than “people”, and also translates “us” rather than “them” in the next sentence as well.

^{vii} John Piper; “Spectacular Sins & Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ”; Crossway Books, 2008 – cf. pp. 65-73, “The Pride of Babel & the Praise of Christ”.

^{viii} IBID

^{ix} IBID