



**Sunday, January 21, 2024**

## **Revelation 5**

Chapter 4 and 5 of the book of Revelation are viewed as the backbone of the book, because as we learned last week from Chapter 4, this is where John is able to see clearly the throne room of heaven, where God almighty is securely fixed on the throne in all power, authority, and might. This is a scene that has been described throughout the ages, but make no mistake. No human language or picture will ever be able to fully comprehend the elaborate and utter brilliance of what John saw. Everything is covered in Light, but not blinding light. John describes the brilliant clarity of the light as seen through the lens of various jewel tones. Even the crystal sea before the Throne is a sight to behold. The all-seeing creatures that surround Him, worship Him day and night, symbolizing that nothing in all of creation catches God off-guard. He knows all things. He sees all things and is in complete and utter control.

Now, as we step into chapter 5, we will see the omniscient control of God as it relates to the unveiling of the plan for the world that has lost its way. This plan is characterized by a Scroll in the hand of God that none can open save for One - Jesus Christ: the Root of David / the Lion of Judah / the Lamb that was slain.

### *Revelation 5:1-14 (NKJV)*

*‘And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” 3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.*

4 So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. 5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll,  
And to open its seals;  
For You were slain,  
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood  
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,  
10 And have made us kings and priests to our God;  
And we shall reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
To receive power and riches and wisdom,  
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

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

"Blessing and honor and glory and power  
Be to Him who sits on the throne,  
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

14 Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.'

## The Scroll.

The first thing we see in the second part of John's vision of the throne room is a scroll in the right hand of God, as he is seated firmly on the throne. Historically, this scroll is best interpreted as the plans and strategies that God will use in the end times to establish his kingdom on earth. It is a scroll that is sealed with seven seals, and as each one is unlocked, they contain specific events or judgments that must take place first before the fulfilment of God's kingdom on earth can be finalized.

It is important to note that this scroll is in the right hand, and not the left hand of God. All throughout the scripture and historic culture, it is the right hand, that symbolizes power and authority.

It might seem obvious, but it is also significant to note that it is not a book in the right hand of God Almighty, but it is a scroll. In the first century, the literary form of recording was the Scroll and not yet the book. Scrolls were made from papyrus, manufactured in single sheets about ten inches by eight with a wooden roller at each end. It was held in the left hand, unrolled with the right, and, as the reading went on, the part in the left hand was rolled up again. Depending on the book, the size of the scroll would vary. For example, the book of Romans would require a scroll 11 feet long; the Gospel of Mark would have been close to 19 feet long and the Book of Acts was close to 32 feet long (length from the wall to the stage).

So, this would be a biblically and culturally correct representation of the Scroll that John was seeing in the hand of God:



However, if you look at the image of this scroll and compare it with a scroll in the book of Revelation, you will see that there is one main difference which is that the scroll in the Revelation 5 is written on both sides. It was very, very uncommon, and almost unheard of to use both sides of the scroll because the construction of the paper-like papyrus made it this way. Papyrus was made from long bullrushes almost as thick as a person's arm. They would open the outer case to reveal a soft, sponge-like core that was called the pith. They would take the pith and cut it into long strips and lay them out on a table side by side in a linear fashion. Another layer would then be added horizontally and then it would be pressed together and then dried. Once it was dry and ready to use, the horizontal layer would then act as the writing surface as it would act as a guide for writing to keep the lines straight. Even if the scroll was getting too long and heavy, it was a more favourable option to use a second scroll instead of the back of the original because the back contained the vertical grain of the reeds instead of the horizontal grain like the front. Writing against the vertical grain was challenging, and would often lead to mistakes, smudges and inconsistencies as the delicate pens would have difficulty writing against the grain.

The fact that this scroll is written on both sides is significant because it indicates that this is a comprehensive and complete message - that everything contained in this scroll - front and back - is complete there is no room for anything to be added. Nothing more can be added to the plans of God - indicating the final and complete nature of the divine revelation and coming judgment contained within.

Some scholars also believe that the nature of the double-sided scroll could also act as a parallel to the Word of God. Just like the scroll, the word of God is a complete and comprehensive work, also written on 'both sides.' Both the Old and the New Testament culminate together to form a complete picture of the plan of God for the course of human history. Nothing can be added to that and nothing can be taken away.

And so in the midst of this imagery is a clear depiction of the authority and the sovereignty of Almighty God in the plans, and the purposes that He has in store for us.

The next thing we see, is an image of a strong and mighty angel - with a mighty voice that stretches through the entire universe. He has just cried out to see if there was anyone worthy to take the scroll and open it and unlock each of the seven seals to reveal that which was hidden within. This angel's voice is so strong that it reverberates through the heavens, to the Earth, and beneath the Earth. There is not one corner of the universe that is untouched by the voice of this strong and mighty angel. Which indicates that when no one is found worthy to open the scroll, it is not because

he missed out on anybody. It's because the call went out every inch of the universe and none was worthy. We know how the story ends but it's important to understand that at this point in the vision, John does not. This information brings him to his knees in bitter despair and he begins to weep uncontrollably.

Based on John's reaction here, we get the impression that John understands the significance and importance of the scroll, and when he realizes that no one can implement these plans and strategies in order for God to establish His kingdom on earth, his response is to break down in despair.

Which is actually something I've wrestled with for a while now, because I can't seem to wrap my mind around John's strong reaction here. You see, weeping is a very intimate and personal reaction to a personal tragedy. But John is an observer in this giant play, not one of the main characters. I remember reading this and being reminded of the movie, the never ending story. It's a movie about a kid who is stuck in a school janitor closet and ends up reading this book, and finds himself immersed in the story. So much so, that, when the main character - Atreyu's horse dies in the swamp the camera switches back to the boy reading, and you see tears streaming down his face and dropping on the book. He wasn't a character necessarily in the movie, but you see, there was a connection in the story so strong that it illicited this intimate and vulnerable reaction such as what we see with John here.

The deeper I began to think on this though, the more clear it became to me that the strong connection that John has to this story is actually Jesus. John's weeping needs to be viewed here through the lens of his relationship with Jesus. You see, as one of Jesus' 12 disciples, John shared a deep and personal relationship with Him that was deeper than friendship or brotherhood or perhaps even both combined. John was with Jesus every single step of the way for the better part of 3 years. He walked with Him through the highs and the lows of ministry and ultimately all the way to the cross where Jesus bore the sins of humanity on His shoulders as He breathed His last breath. It was hands-down, the most painful, heart-wrenching thing that John had ever witnessed or experienced, but he knew that this was all according to God's greater plan, so that gave him strength to hope for the future.

But now, that hope for the future has just been dashed, because there is no one that can carry on with what Jesus started. And so of course he weeps. He weeps because if there is no way to carry forth the continued plans and promises of God then, what was the point of the suffering? What was the point of the pain? What was the point of salvation if all hope is now lost.... Of course, he wept because all hope was gone in that moment.

But as in most well written plays, there is a moment where tragedy turns to triumph....

And in the middle of John's, heaving sobs, one of the 24 elders leans over to him - perhaps with a knowing twinkle in his eye as if to say - John, you've been here before. You know that all hope was not lost when Jesus died on the cross for three days later He rose miraculously from the grave. Hope was not lost then John and it isn't lost now because Hope always finds a way. Because Hope has a name. He's the Lion of Judah, the root of David. Look John - it's the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world!!

As John looks up from his place of tragedy into the throne of triumph He sees Jesus as the lamb of God, with God, as God. And all of this happens in an instant, and it's almost as if all of the heavenly hosts were witnessing the same thing as him, and immediately the chorus of heaven, erupts in worship! Over 100 million voices all declaring with one voice that He alone is worthy...blessing and glory and honour and power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever!

It's Jesus. Of course it is Jesus. Who else could it be? And He is in the centre of the throne appropriately depicted as a Lamb that was slain. With seven horns and seven eyes, we see that this is a picture of completion because the number 7 is used. Horns that represent strength and ability - he is perfectly strong and able to carry out the task at hand and with 7 eyes that symbolize omniscience and all-knowing. Nothing gets past Him.

There are three titles given for Jesus, but only one depiction here. The elder declares that He is the Lion of Judah, and the Root of David. The Lion of Judah title goes all the way back to Genesis and the 12 tribes of Israel of which Judah is one. In Genesis 49:9 Jacob prophesies that the sceptre will not depart from Judah and goes on to refer to the tribe of Judah as a lion's cub and this lion symbolism stuck with the tribe especially as the tribe of Judah began to grow in strength, power and sovereignty - just like the true nature of a lion. The root of David is a reference to the lineage of the Messiah, as being one who comes through the bloodline of David, which is true of Jesus as being one who not only came through the bloodline of David, but first through the lineage of Judah. So these two statements are a double prophetic fulfilment of the lineage of the Messiah as being that of Jesus.

The juxtaposition of being referred to as the Lion of Judah and as the Lamb that was slain at the same time is also significant because it highlights the dual aspects of Jesus' nature as the powerful, conquering lion who triumphs over evil and as the sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus is both lion and lamb. Warrior and Sacrifice. But notice it's not the lion that opens the scroll - it's the lamb.

It was His death and resurrection that made redemption and salvation possible in the first place, and so it's that selfless, sacrificial nature that makes Him worthy. Remember, there was no one in Heaven or on Earth or under the earth that could do this either and so it makes complete sense then that it would be the same Jesus - the sacrificial Lamb - that would continue to be the One - the only One - that could do what no one ever has or ever will be able to do.

And the imagery here is quite powerful too because historically a lion symbolizes authority and conquering whereas the lamb that was slain emphasizes mercy, grace, and self-giving love as central to God's nature. The imagery of the Lamb therefore underscores the idea that God's ultimate power is displayed not in overwhelming force or compulsion, but in vulnerability and self-giving. This is what C.S. Lewis tried to help us understand in the Chronicles of Narnia. Aslan the Lion does not win as the Lion. Aslan breaks the spell of the witch when he lays helpless on the stone table and lets evil do to Him what it has always wanted to do. And in the moment He dies, "the deeper magic," as Aslan calls it, kicks in and death begins to "work backward." Sacrificial love, as weak and foolish as it appears, overcomes. Nothing else does.

And so the fact that only the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll reaffirms that Jesus is central to all of God's purposes, both in the past (through his life, death, and resurrection) and in the future (in his role as judge and king).

The Lion overcomes by becoming a Lamb.

The lamb is in the midst of the throne.

The throne now - in addition to being a symbol of power and authority and judgment it is now also clearly a symbol of Grace. Great grace.

And this is absolutely key, because as we step into the next few chapters where Jesus opens the seven seals, we are going to see some disturbing things and these things can strike fear and dread into the undiscerning heart. But in the middle of all of this war and judgement that can bring about great fear, the reminder is that Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb is sitting on the throne and there is great grace extended to those that will yield their hearts, minds and souls to Him. Yes, the throne is a symbol of power, authority, and righteous judgment, but it's also a symbol of grace because the Lamb of Grace inhabits this throne. If anything, this should remind us of the initial, opening image of Jesus as the warrior in front of John. John falls, as if dead at this sight, because it is so fearful and

overwhelming, but in the next verse, we read that this warrior image, Jesus reaches down with his righteous right arm, and reassures John of his love for him. Make no mistake, that same reassurance of love, and grace is embodied, and pictured here by Jesus as the Lamb reigning on the throne of grace.

As Darrell Johnson says: 'The lamb reigns, by entering into the hurts of the world and taking them into himself. And so do the Lambs followers. We choose to do as he does: walk into the face of evil, declare the truth, intercede for mercy, and take whatever comes. Evil is overcome only one way – by the power of sacrificial goodness. Evil is not overcome by more evil. Evil begets more evil. Violence begets violence. Hatred begets hatred. Only sacrificial goodness can finally stop evil in its tracks. We do not overcome the evil of history by echoing evil, by playing the game on evils terms. We overcome by speaking the truth, by blessing the enemy, by enduring the suffering, instead of inflicting the suffering. Evil is only defeated when it is outmatched by sacrificial goodness. Goodness, that is willing to go all the way.'

This is the grace of God extended towards us and the grace that we are now to extend towards others and some would say that this is weakness but it is strength. It might not be the battle strategy of the world, but it is the battle strategy of the one who overcomes the world. And His grace is sufficient for you. This is why the writer of Hebrews says:

*Hebrews 4:16*

*'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'*

It doesn't matter what you've done or how often you've done it. There's room in His heart for you. His grace is sufficient for you. His love is greater than your sin. And His sacrifice as the Lamb that was slain, paved the way for your salvation and for mine. He calls us to live as lambs, not lions. That we can only achieve the strength of a lion by living as a lamb.

Share story of monk (Telemachus) who got in the midst of gladiator games in Rome. Shows up to the colosseum in Rome and in the middle of a heated battle steps into the ring. The gladiators halt what their battles momentarily as they try to adjust to the image of the monk before them telling them to halt their actions. The crowd is furious and call for the death of the monk as they hail down rocks from their seats. The gladiators finish what the crowd started and in moments Telemachus the monk lay dead before their feet.

His work was accomplished the moment he was struck down for the shock of this death before their eyes was unprecedented and actually had the power to turn the heart of Honorius the Emperor. In another unprecedented move, Honorius issued a decree which banned all gladiator fights in the Colosseum from that day forward, effectively bringing an end shortly thereafter to these brutal contests. And so, the apparently weak act of an apparently foolish human, broke the back of evil, and that is the mystery that is being opened up for us in this last book of the Bible, for the Lion has triumphed, and I looked, and behold a Lamb. The Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world.

Live and Love like Jesus, friends.

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