



To the Lamb upon the Throne

Behold Our God! – Read the Bible for Life Series #51

Revelation 5:1-15

David Sunday

November 11, 2012

God, as You've so faithfully given us everything we need, we have offered these gifts as a token of our lives and a living sacrifice to You. We pray now as Your Word is opened to us that You would captivate our hearts' affections and ignite our imaginations so we would see that which is invisible and our lives would be moved by the things that move Heaven. Lord, we pray that we would be caught up into that heavenly choir and that the way we live here on earth would reflect the worship of the precious Lamb of glory each day of our lives. Use Your Word now to quicken our hearts, to convict us, to strengthen us, to encourage us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to commend those of you who have read through the Bible over these past 15 months. This week is the last week in our Bible reading plan and if you've stuck with that, you will complete the reading of the Holy Scriptures this week. We've seen throughout the Bible that history is His-story—that Christ is at the center of all the Scriptures.

At the end of our journey through the Bible, we're going to turn to the book of Revelation. In chapters four and five we find no less than five doxologies of praise to the God of glory and grace. We're going to read Revelation 5:

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,*

*“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.*

Thanks be to God for His living Word. Amen.

Over one hundred years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Zwemer, who were missionaries to the Muslims, wrote a children’s book. Listen to how they encouraged children about the work of the gospel in Arabia.

“When you read in mission reports of troubles and opposition, burning of books, imprisoning of colporteurs and expelling of missionaries, you must not think that the gospel is being defeated. It is conquering! What we see under such circumstances is only the dust in the wake of the plowman. God is turning the world upside down that it might be right side up when Jesus comes. So he who plows should plow in hope. We may not be able to see a harvest yet in this country but furrow upon furrow, the soil is getting ready for the seed.”

That’s what sustained the Zwemers in their work in a very hard place. I love that phrase, “God is turning the world upside down that it might be right side up when Jesus comes.” You might feel like the Christians in the first century did—like the world is being turned upside down. They lived under the reign of terror from evil Roman emperors. But God gave this glorious vision to the Apostle John to comfort their hearts with the truth that

the world will be right side up when Jesus comes again and that He is going to make all things new.

You might feel like your world is being turned upside down in your personal life today when you consider the state of our nation, or look at the lives of Christians around you, or consider upheaval and private pain in your own personal life; as your plans fail and your dreams die, your strength evaporates, your wisdom expires, your resources run out. But God gives us a vision here in Revelation 5 that is designed to help us keep our balance and keep standing firm in hope when it feels like everything is being shaken. When it feels like the world is being turned upside down.

In this vision, we have five images that help focus our spiritual vision. If we fix our minds and hearts on these images and believe what they represent, we will be able to keep our steps secure in a world of upheaval. These five images are a throne, a scroll, a Lion, a Lamb and a choir.

Let's look at these images together in this topsy-turvy world in which we live.

A Throne

First of all, the throne is central to John's vision in Revelation 4-5. It is mentioned 17 times in these two chapters. It's a symbol of the sovereignty, majesty and kingly rule of almighty God. This vision would have been very poignant to the small struggling churches of Asia Minor, reminding them that they do not need to fear the dark powers of Rome for at the center of the universe there is this throne from which the planets receive their orders. To that throne the gigantic galaxies pledge their allegiance and from that throne, the tiniest organism derives its life. This throne is at the center of the universe.

Notice in Revelation 5:1, that it's not a vacant throne. It is occupied. The real throne of this world is not in Rome or in Washington D.C. The real throne of this world and this universe is in Heaven. God rules. We need to remember that on this Sunday after an election. Daniel 4:25 says, "*...the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.*" Heaven rules.

As Psalm 9 is stated in an old hymn:

The Lord, the everlasting King,
Is seated on His judgment throne;
The righteous Judge of all the world
Will make His perfect justice known.

(O Lord Most High, With All My Heart from the Psalter, 1912)

As John looks at this throne in chapter four, he sees it is surrounded by ceaseless worship. Everything around this throne is engaged in the worship of almighty God. Let's read Revelation 4:8 to get a taste of that worship:

*And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,
"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!"*

That's the first doxology in these visions. It's focused on the holy, eternal, almighty God.

Verses nine through eleven:

*⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
¹¹ "Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created."*

So there's a throne at the center of the universe and we need to ask ourselves continuously, "Is this throne at the center of my vision? Is the eternal, holy, sovereign Creator of the universe at the center of my vision of reality? Do I find my supreme pleasure in worshipping Him? Do I take pleasure and delight in Him? Do I rest in the fact that I am not in control of the universe but God is? Do I see all of my life in submission to the One Who sits on that throne? Do I live in such a way that every thought and word and deed comes under the rule of Him Who is worthy to receive glory and honor and power forever?"

Test your vision. Is your vision of life and history governed by a vision of God's throne at the center of the entire universe?

A Scroll

Secondly, we see a scroll in Revelation 5:1, "*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.*" What is this scroll? This scroll is the book of history which contains God's plans for the

destiny of the world. This scroll is the blueprint for the progress of the gospel and also contains God's judgments against those who reject that gospel.

Where is this scroll? It's in the right hand of the One Who is seated on the throne. What does that mean? It means God holds all of the future in His hands. God writes the script. He directs the events. When the gospel prevails and Christ's Kingdom conquers and judgment falls on the unbelieving world, it is because God has a firm grip on the steering wheel of history. He holds this scroll in His right hand and is working out all His purposes.

Notice that this scroll is written on the front and the back. It's packed with plans. This means God's plans for the future are complete. He has not overlooked anything. There's no future possibility unknown to God. There are no events that catch Him by surprise. No one can add anything to what God has already planned. There's no space for a bill of rights or an amendment to God's plan—God's scroll. It means if I trust and obey Him and entrust my life to His Son, Jesus Christ, nothing that happens in my life—no matter how bad it seems—will throw God's plans off kilter. God is going to use all these things and work them out to a glorious end. No matter how good my life may seem right now and no matter how much it might seem like I'm in control of my destiny right now, this scroll in God's right hand means if I don't trust in His Son—if I reject His authority over my life and I don't obey Him—nothing that I can do forever will keep me from experiencing God's judgments. God will ultimately determine my destiny and that destiny will be determined by my response of faith to Him.

This scroll is sealed with seven seals. The One Who opens the seals is the One Who has the right to reveal and execute everything that's written in that scroll—all of God's plans. The seals need to be opened for the plans to come to pass and Whoever opens it will bring history to God's appointed conclusion which raises a problem. A problem that is mentioned in verse three: *"And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it..."* No angel can help. No one on earth, no man, no politician, no athlete, no banker, no entrepreneur, no professor or philosopher, no hero, no leader has any power to do anything to bring God's plan to pass. No one is worthy to open the scroll or to break its seals. And no one *"under the earth"* can do it. Not the fallen angels; not the spirits of the dead; not even Satan himself can open that scroll or break its seals.

You see, creation is being put firmly in its place. All created beings are absolutely impotent to bring to pass God's eternal Kingdom. And this is greatly distressing to John.

When he sees that no one can open that scroll or break its seals, in verse four he tells us, “...*I began to weep loudly...*” He’s weeping because he knows what will not happen if this scroll is not opened. If we look at chapters 6-8 when the scroll is opened—when the seals are broken by the Lord Jesus Christ—we start to see the events that unfold as these seals are broken and the scroll is opened. If we look at those events in chapters 6-8 we see why John is weeping because none of these things are going to happen if no one is found who is worthy to open this scroll. If no one can open this scroll,

- Jesus will not be worshipped as the world’s Redeemer.
- The martyrs of the faith will not be avenged for their blood.
- The prayers of the saints will not be answered.
- God’s appointed plans will not come to pass.
- The kingdom of this world will not become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.
- The wicked will not be judged.
- Jesus will not come back and God will not reign in glory in the New Heavens and the New Earth if this scroll is not opened.

John is weeping because he knows if no one can open the scroll, nothing that God has promised will come to pass. The gospel will not triumph. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb will be cancelled. The New Heaven and the New Earth will disappear. Eternal life will get swallowed up in eternal darkness. Friends, if no one can open the scroll or open its seals, all of us will be swept into an eternal hell. The world will be turned upside down, never to be right side up again.

It’s not hard to put ourselves in John’s shoes with his weeping because we too know God is sovereign. We know God has a plan. We believe these things. But when our world is turned upside down, we cannot always see what God’s plan is. We don’t usually know what God is up to in those situations. We don’t understand how He is going to bring glory to Himself and good to us out of these upheavals. So we doubt. We get discouraged. We’re no longer sure of the object of our hope. We’re no longer certain of what we cannot see. We weep and wonder, “How is good going to come out of this? Is there any purpose? Is there any plot to history? Is everything just random or is someone guiding this to a glorious outcome?”

When we feel that way, that’s when we need to remember upon Whose shoulders the government of this world rests. This is when we need to see Jesus as a conquering Lion.

A Lion

The Lion is the next image John reveals in verse five. As John weeps loudly, one of the elders comes to him and says, “John, weep no more. Stop crying, John. Look. Behold—see something here John. There’s a Lion— *‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered..’*” He’s reminding John of the promises of God in the Old Testament to Judah and David. Promises of a conquering King Who would reign forever in justice, righteousness and peace. The very promises that were making John weep right now because he is wondering if they’re going to be fulfilled. The elder says to him, “The Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered and because He has conquered, He can take over the future of world history. He’s in charge so stop weeping, John. Trust Him, John. Praise God that He has put the future of the universe in the hands of His Son Jesus.”

Friends, a future without Jesus is a future that’s full of weeping. But a future that is being controlled by Jesus—if your destiny is in the hands of the Savior in Whom you trust—it’s a future of endless joy. Everlasting joy will crown our heads.

A Lamb

Then the elder said, “John, look! Behold! The Lion.” In a dramatic moment (verse six), John turns to see this Lion Who has conquered, but what does he find instead? Not a Lion but a Lamb—the fourth image that God uses to captivate our imaginations. Look at verse six, *“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.”*

So Who is Jesus? Is Jesus a Lion Whom we can admire for His ferocious fright and His regal authority? Or is Jesus a like a lamb? An animal that is easily preyed upon; meek and lonely. Sheered for our clothes; killed for our food? Who is He? The answer is both the Lion and the Lamb. He’s a Lion Who is like a Lamb and He’s a Lamb Who is like a Lion.

Now think about this statement from Jonathan Edwards for a moment. He said, “There is an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies in Jesus Christ.” There comes together in Jesus an admirable mixture of diverse excellencies—things that we don’t often find together in a person. What makes a person truly admirable is when many diverse qualities blend together in harmony. You might admire a man greatly for his strength and his firm resolve but when you see that strong, firm man weeping over the plight of a neighbor who is suffering from bone cancer—when you see that his strength is tempered by

tenderness and compassion—you admire him all the more for this “admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies.”

You might admire a woman for her sensitive, compassionate heart toward everyone. She’s a model of gentleness and kindness. She’s the type of woman who, whenever you think, “I need a hug” you think of going to this woman because she’s so tender hearted. But then you see her stricken of her husband at age 35 and left to raise four young children alone and you realize that not only is she tender but she’s also tenacious. She’s strong. You never knew that strength existed. You admire her all the more for that “admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies.”

This is what makes Jesus Christ so eminently worthy of our admiration. In Him there is an “admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies.”

- There is majesty but also meekness.
- There is justice but also mercy.
- There is manhood but also deity.
- There is power that can still the wind and the waves yet there is submission to death, even death on a cross.

As we see this Lamb in verse six, we see this admirable mixture in Jesus. Note the paradoxes here in verse six. Instead of a Lion Who is royal, dignified, ruling and powerful, John sees a Lamb Who is quiet, submissive, humble and slain. Lions kill—lambs get killed. This Lamb has been slain yet He’s standing. He’s standing in the presence of the throne room of Almighty God. Dead lambs don’t stand but here He is standing strong.

He has seven horns which is a symbol of absolute military strength. There is nothing He cannot accomplish. And He has seven eyes which signify the fullness of the Spirit. He knows everything there is to know. Nothing escapes His notice. He sees all. He knows all. He is Lord over all. The way this Lion has conquered is by becoming a Lamb Who was slain. He conquers through sacrifice. When He was most weak, that’s when He was most strong. When He suffered the most from His enemies, when they struck the deadliest blow against Him, He was actually striking the deadliest blow against them. He conquered by getting killed. That’s an “admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies” in Jesus Christ.

Jonathan Edwards illustrated it by comparing this to Jonah and the whale. Listen to what he says,

“The devil had, as it were, swallowed up Christ, as the whale did Jonah—but it was deadly poison to him, he gave him a mortal wound in his own bowels. He was soon sick of his morsel and was forced to do by

him as the whale did by Jonah. To this day he is heart-sick of what he then swallowed as his prey.”

Do you hear what Edwards is saying? The devil got a bad stomach ache when he killed Jesus on that cross and he still has a stomach ache today. He’s still sick to his stomach by what he swallowed up on that day because that became a deadly poison to him—a poison that will destroy Satan forever.

The application of this is that Jesus redefines what victory looks like. We have our ideas of what a right-side-up world looks like but often in this world, victory looks upside down from what the world expects. On this side of heaven, victory in God’s plan often looks like defeat. On this side of heaven, victory often looks like suffering and death. So when it feels like your world is being turned upside down, when it feels like you’re so weak, when it feels like you’re almost defeated, don’t run away from weakness. Instead embrace it and believe that through your weakness, God is going to show strength and power.

Look at verse seven. *“And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.”* Imagine that! The audacity! No one else in heaven or earth was able to do this. But this Lamb steps up—slain but standing—and no one stops Jesus from taking that scroll. No angel says to Him, “Don’t take another step.” No elder says to Him, “Back down.” Not even the heavenly Father Who is seated on the throne says, “What are You doing?”

The Lamb comes—He Who was slain, buried and raised to life again—and says, “Give Me the scroll of history. Let Me bring to completion the glorious plans of Almighty God for the salvation of the nations and the judgment of those who reject Him. Let Me bring it all to completion.” And God responds, “Son, here’s the scroll. It’s Yours—You control the destiny of the universe. You control the destiny of everyone who lives in that universe. History will be Your story.”

This is proof that Jesus is God. John could not have said it any clearer even if he said, “Jesus is God” in verse seven. This is ultimate proof of Who He is. He’s great. He’s in control. He’s commanding our lives.

What is bigger to you right now? What dominates your attention right now more? Your disappointments? Your pain? Your obstacles? Or Jesus, the Lion-like-Lamb Who was slain to ransom you from your sins? Is Jesus bigger to you than all your problems and disappointments? Do you take gladness in resting in the fact that Jesus is in charge of how

your life will turn out? That Jesus is in charge of the outcome of your children's lives? Is that good news to you today?

If it is, you'll want to begin rehearsing now for the heavenly choir that is already in concert. Let's listen to them sing as we come to the last image of Revelation 5.

A Choir

Three more doxologies unfold. This cascade of praise prepares us to worship our Savior around this communion table. Look at verse eight:

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.

Friends, this is telling us that when we pray right now in the midst of our difficulties, *"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..."*—when we pour out our hearts to God—not one of those prayers goes to waste. Not one of those prayers is unnoticed. Our prayers now will be mingled with the praises of heaven as incense before our God.

Then in verse nine, they begin singing a new song. A song that's even better than Revelation 4 where they praise the Creator. Heaven turns up the volume because now Jesus is standing there, the Lamb Who has been slain. They praise Him 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,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth."*

They're rejoicing in heaven today because Jesus is ransoming people for God, from every part of this globe. There's going to be an international, multi-ethnic gathering before the throne, worshiping Him as a kingdom of priests reigning on the earth. Right now we might feel outnumbered. We might feel like a minority—and we are in the world today. But when we join the heavenly choir, we will see that those who worship the Lamb are a vast multitude; an innumerable multitude.

Look at verse 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..."

Friends, this is going on right now in Heaven. If only we could hear faint echoes of it here on earth, how that would stabilize, secure and comfort us. In the midst of our difficulties, if we could hear echoes of the worship of Heaven and the choir of the redeemed, we would join with them on earth today in a dress rehearsal (verse 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!”*

What I want us to realize is the theme of our witness right now is going to be the theme of our worship forever. Right now we witness to the world of a Savior Who died for their sins and Who rose again to give them everlasting life. In Heaven we’re not going to be evangelizing anyone anymore but we’re going to be singing the evangels forever. We’re going to be singing about the gospel forever. That will be the theme of our worship—the worthy Lamb.

He’s worthy of all honor because nothing could be given to Him that He would dishonor or abuse. He will not abuse power so He’s worthy of all power. He will not misuse wealth, so He’s worthy of all wealth. He will do good with all might so we can trust Him with it. He will respond rightly to “He’s worthy of honor and glory and blessing”—why? Because He was slain and through His death He conquered. What looked on the cross like defeat, poverty, foolishness, weakness, shame, disgrace and cursing has been transformed by God into a source of eternal power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory and blessing. That’s what the cross is—wisdom, might, honor, glory and blessing.

So if you see all of this in the cross of Jesus, He invites you to come to this communion table. What should we do when we come to this table? We should say to the One Who gave His all for us, “Lord Jesus, I yield my life to You. Whatever power I have, I want to use it to bring glory to Your name. Whatever wisdom I have, Lord Jesus, I want to use it to bring glory to You and good to others. Whatever strength I have, it’s Yours. Whatever wealth I’ve been blessed with, Jesus, worthy are You of all my wealth—it belongs to You. In fact, Jesus...

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

(When I Survey the Wondrous Cross by Isaac Watts; 1707)

Give Him at this table, all your strength. Give Him all your honor. Give Him all the glory. Let the worship that we have here be like a dress rehearsal for the doxology of all eternity. If you are trusting in Jesus alone to be your Savior, if you say to Him, “Lord Jesus, You were slain so that I might live. Lord Jesus, You died for me and I need You to be my Savior” then He invites you to come to this table. If you’re happy to have Jesus command your destiny, He welcomes you to come and feast on Him.

But if you’re not sure this morning if that’s true of you, we would encourage you to not partake of the communion table but instead yield your life to Jesus Who will determine your destiny. Say to Him, “Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I need you to be my Savior. I trust in You. I give my life to You.” He will save you today.

Let’s worship God together. Let’s join in the doxology of eternity as it’s stated in verse 13,

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

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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