



Sunday School Lesson for 5/9/2004.

Revelation 5:1-12. Worthy Is the Lamb
Questions and answers below.

TIME: A.D. 96

PLACE: from Patmos

Revelation 5:1-10

1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.

9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Lesson Background

In the first chapter of the book of Revelation, we learn that John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos because of his testimony concerning Jesus Christ. There he received a wondrous vision of

the Saviour and was told to write down the things that he had seen.

Chapters 2 and 3 record messages Christ sent to seven churches in Asia Minor. Chapter 4 begins the description of things to come by introducing readers to God's throne in heaven, twenty-four elders, and four living creatures. This week's lesson is

based on Revelation 5:1-12, which describes a seven-sealed book or scroll, the only One worthy to open the seals, and the universal worship of God and the Lamb.

The contrast between weak humanity and powerful divinity is portrayed throughout the text. No one was found in heaven, on earth, or under the earth who was capable of opening the seals, and John wept because of the problem. Then an elder told him not to weep, for the Lion of Judah and the Root of David had prevailed to open them.

After universal worship of God and the Lamb was generated, John revealed what the seven seals represented as they were opened in Revelation 6:1-17 and 8:1.

Book Sealed (Revelation 5:1-4)

1. What physical form did the book in our text likely have (Revelation 5:1)?

The book mentioned in this passage was no doubt a scroll, such as was commonly used in ancient times, rather than a bound book of pages such as we have today. It was held by the One who sat on the throne. In his vision, which begins in chapter 4, the Apostle John saw God seated on a throne in heaven. The scroll He held had writing on both sides of the parchment, but the contents would have been obscured by the fact that the parchment was rolled up with most of the writing concealed.

2. What were the probable contents of the scroll?

It appears that the various parts of the scroll revealed events on God's schedule for the end times. This implied that God was sovereignly in control of coming events, and John must have been encouraged by that.

3. Why was a search made for someone to open it (v. 2)?

As John looked on the scene, he saw a strong angel appear. This may have been Gabriel or Michael, two angels who are named in the Scriptures. This angel proclaimed in a loud voice for all to hear a question that apparently was on everyone's mind—"Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" It had to be someone with certain credentials or qualifications for doing these honors.

The angel most likely knew the answer to his own question, but he asked it to underscore the fact that whoever opened the scroll had to be a divine being. Verses 3 and 4 shows the helplessness of human beings to do what was needed.

4. What was John's reaction to the fruitless search to find someone to open the scroll (vs. 3,4)?

It appears that a search was conducted to prove the fact that no one in heaven, on earth, or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it.

John did not record the reaction to the fruitless search from anyone else, but he was greatly disheartened by it. He wept much over the fact that no one was found worthy to read the scroll or to look upon it. This grief apparently was not caused by mere curiosity. John may have feared that God's plans for the future were jeopardized by the inability to open the scroll.

Unworthy!

It was an amazing decision: at the height of the 1996 college football season, Robert Carothers, President of the University of Rhode Island, suspended all seventy-two players, thus forfeiting an upcoming game with rival University of Connecticut. The reason? Six team members had rushed into a fraternity house and beat up three residents while twenty-five teammates surrounded the house to ensure that no one escaped.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association said that in its long history no team had ever forfeited a game for such a reason. Some complained because the action jeopardized the team's playoff chances. But the president became a hero to many who had been saddened and sickened by the attitude of many sports "heroes" who thought themselves immune to the requirement of decent conduct. "This is not about football," Carothers said. "This is about character." President Carothers's suspension of the team said, in effect, that the team was not worthy to carry the university's name and colors onto the field.

When we talk in terms of human worthiness before God, we always must conclude, "No one is worthy." Not one of us is worthy to carry the "name and colors" before Him. Sin has made this tragically so. Does this fact make you weep as it did John?
—Charles R. Boatman

Only One Worthy to Open the Book (Revelation 5:5-7)

5. What is the significance of the titles "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" and "the Root of David" (v. 5)?

There were twenty-four elders occupying twenty-four seats or thrones around the throne of God in heaven (4:4). One of those elders told John to stop weeping. He said that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, also known as the Root of David, had prevailed and could open the book or scroll and loosen its seven seals to reveal its contents.

In Jacob's dying blessing on his son Judah, he had described him as a lion, saying that the scepter would not depart from him or his tribe (Gen. 49:9,10). Jesus Christ came from the tribe of Judah.

Isaiah 11:1 says, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse (David's father), and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Isaiah 11:10 says, "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people." Jesus Himself later said, "I am the root and the offspring of David" (Rev. 22:16).

The elder speaking to John was clearly referring to Jesus Christ when he said that the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, had prevailed to open the seven seals. To prevail meant to overcome, conquer, or win a victory. This referred to Christ's victory over Satan and every evil power through His redemptive work in shedding His blood at Calvary (Rev. 5:9).

6. What did the seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb symbolize (v. 6)?

As John continued gazing on the heavenly scene, he saw in the midst of God's throne, surrounded by the four beasts, or living creatures and the twenty-four

elders, a Lamb. The Lamb standing there had the appearance of having been slain. Perhaps scars from wounds were visible. This is obviously a reference to Jesus Christ, who had suffered greatly from torture and crucifixion at Calvary.

The Lamb had "seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." When the Spirit is called the "seven Spirits" of God (Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), we do not count Spirits, but rather we consider His "sevenfold" potential to convict and encourage the faithful Christian.

Seven is the number of completeness and horns represent power, suggesting that Christ, the Lamb, has all power. Seven eyes suggest that He also has complete wisdom and intelligence to foresee and oversee. The seven eyes are equated with the sevenfold Spirit of God, that is, the Holy Spirit, sent to minister throughout the whole earth.

Similar language is used in Zechariah 3:9 and 4:10, and we know that the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and God the Son (John 15:26). The three Persons of the Triune Godhead are fully united.

As John watched, the Lamb, Jesus Christ, came forward and took the book or scroll out of the hand of His heavenly Father (Rev. 5:7). He had the legal right to hold it, break the seven seals, and read its contents. He is, indeed, the only being in the whole universe worthy of doing this, as is shown in verse 9.

7. Verse 6 places the spotlight on the Lamb. What are some ways we can put the spotlight on the Lamb in everything we do?

Our church services should center on Christ by being saturated with reminders of Him as Creator, Redeemer, and the One who will return. Songs and sermons should be Christ-centered, and visitors should always be told how to accept Christ and be encouraged to do so.

Our homes should be places where Jesus is mentioned often. At work, our coworkers should know without a doubt—by our words, and our character— that we are in love with Jesus. Our witnessing should focus less on our church, our preacher, prominent members, and our own stories, and focus most on the story of Jesus—who He is and what He has done to deserve the spotlight!

The Lamb Worshiped (Revelation 5:8-10)

8. How did the four creatures and twenty-four elders worship Christ (v. 8)?

As soon as the Lamb had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders prostrated themselves in worship before Him. We do not know with certainty the significance or identities of these beings, but we do know that they are praise and worship leaders in heaven.

Their act of falling down before the Lamb must have been temporary, for they proceeded to use their harps to accompany their singing or chanting. Music has been an integral part of worship from Old Testament times onward, and it will have an important role in heavenly worship.

The four creatures and twenty-four elders also had golden vials filled with "odours." Some think these were golden bowls filled with incense made from various spices or gums suitable for burning. Incense has been symbolic of prayer, and the incense in this case was called "the prayers of saints."

Passages such as Ephesians 1:1 and Philippians 1:1 remind us that all Christians are "saints." This means that the prayers of saints are our prayers, too! It is

interesting to think of the prayers of saints, meaning all true believers, as being used in heavenly worship.

9. What did their song say Christ was worthy to do (v. 9)?

Many folks who have been to church for years don't like to learn any new songs. They're content to stick with their "old favorites"! But in God's Heavenly throne room we see those gathered singing a new song (see also Revelation 14:3).

The word "new" doesn't just mean "different." Rather, it signifies a "changed quality" of songs that have been sung before. See also the changed quality of the "new name" in Revelation 2:17 and the "new Jerusalem" in 3:12.

The four living creatures had already composed one song-"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (4:8). The twenty-four elders had already composed a song too-"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (v. 11).

These twenty-eight beings now composed a new song for Christ. They praised Him as being worthy to take the book or scroll and open its seals to see what it contained.

This song praised Christ for dying to redeem them to God by means of His shed blood so that people from all over the world could be saved from their sins.

Robert E. Coleman is right when he adds that "It is called 'a new song' because that which Christ has accomplished is wholly different and superior to the old covenant; nothing like it has ever existed before. New works of grace call forth new songs of praise" (Songs of Heaven).

10. How has the "song" you have sung as a Christian been "new"?

Shame on us if there is no noticeable difference between the old us and the new us! If we have really been rescued from sin, Satan, death, worry, and eternal torment, how can that not be reflected on our faces and in our entire way of life (Romans 6:3-7)?

Whether we're actually singing aloud or just singing on the inside, others should see peace, joy, fulfillment, optimism, satisfaction, and security. We are confident in Christ without being arrogant. The "new" concern for others and interest in more important things ought to leap out at folks who have known us a while. Let the world sing the same old tune; we have a new song!

11. By Who's authority are we made kings and priests (v. 10)?

Peter described Christians in this way: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar (special, treasured) people" (1 Pet. 2:9). Paul said of believers, "If we suffer [with Christ], we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12).

Christ is also praised for His promise that they will reign on earth. This refers to the future millennial period described in Revelation 20:6: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

12. Now that we have become "priests," how can we live out our priestly calling in the coming week?

Unlike Old Testament priests, we do not offer blood sacrifices for sin. We have a Great High Priest who already has done that (Hebrews 4:14-5:10). Praise God! But if it's true that blessing brings responsibility, then God must expect certain things from us as His newly appointed priests. We perform our priestly duties when we teach people about God and Christ. We pray for them. We offer ourselves and our possessions as sacrifices (Romans 12:1; Philippians 4:18; 2 Timothy 4:6). We serve the people of the church, whose bodies are God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16).

How we perform our priestly duties daily is highly individual, and your students will have many different ideas. Remind your students that there is no retirement from our priestly service!

13. What was the purpose of the congregation that John saw assembling (v. 11)?

As John's vision of heaven continued, he saw and heard many angels gathering around the throne of God, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders. The number of angels mentioned seems to have been deliberately vague. We can figure out what "ten thousand times ten thousand" is, but we cannot give a numerical value to "thousands of thousands." The expression refers to an innumerable multitude. A huge congregation was assembling to give praise to Christ.

14. Of what seven things is the Lamb worthy (v. 12)?

This congregation chanted in a loud voice that the Lamb of God who was slain to provide redemption was worthy of seven things. The number seven is again significant in the list of things that the Lamb is worthy to receive. It suggests the completeness, the wholeness, and the perfection by which He is known. The first is power or authority. The second is riches or wealth of all kinds. The third is wisdom. The fourth is strength or might. The fifth is honor or rank. The sixth is glory or majestic splendor. The seventh is blessing or praise.

In an attempt to analyze this list, certain thoughts emerge. If Christ receives these things, some individual, group, or groups must bestow them on Him. God the Father must have bestowed on His beloved Son this power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, and glory. There is a sense in which God also blessed and praised His Son. For example, at Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, there came "a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22).

This brings us directly to the climax of the heavenly act of praise and worship, even though it goes beyond our printed text for this lesson.

Revelation 5:13 says, "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, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Believers on earth who praise Christ now can look forward to joining the heavenly chorus in the future.

Before leaving this lesson, we would do well to take a brief look at the judgments contained in the seven-sealed book or scroll described in Revelation 5:1-8. The first six are revealed in chapter 6. The first was a person on a white horse with a bow and crown who went forth to conquer. The second was a person on a red horse who took

peace from the earth. The third was a person on a black horse holding balances and representing famine on the earth.

The fourth judgment was a person named Death riding a pale horse. The fifth was a martyred remnant under the altar waiting for divine vengeance on their slayers. The sixth was universal anarchy and calamity. The breaking of the seventh seal produced a series of judgments described in Revelation 8:1 through 9:21 and 11:15-19 under the headings of seven trumpets.

CONCLUSION

The symbolic imagery in the book of Revelation can be difficult to interpret, but the central message in this week's lesson comes forth clearly.

The four beasts and the twenty-four elders agree that the Lamb alone is worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll. As He moves front and center in the narrative, elders, beasts, and angels sing His praises and declare His supreme worthiness.

The events portrayed in Revelation 5:1-12 are yet to come. The world at present and in the immediate future may seem dark indeed. We are consoled by the hope that God is in control and that the Lamb is indeed worthy and ultimately victorious! We join our voices in praising and worshiping Him.

PRAYER

Almighty, loving Father, thank You for the book of Revelation. Thank You for the encouragement it gives us to see how You have provided for us through Your saving work as Jesus, the Lamb. We know He is aware of our suffering and all our situations. At times we may struggle to stay faithful and committed to You. Yet by the power of the Holy Spirit we thank You for such portions of Your Word as the text of our lesson that make the presence of the Lamb so real. Because of Him we worship and praise Your name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

The focus of one's worship and life must be on the Lamb.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

The Lamb shall be Shepherd to those who are saved in the tribulation, as we will see in Revelation 7:1-17.

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