

“The Scroll, The Lion and the Lamb” – Revelation Part 11
Revelation 5:1-14

Last week, we witnessed John being summoned to the throne room of heaven. The voice of Jesus had told him, “I will show you what must take place.” Now, it is time for John to see the truth about human history. [P] But a problem must first be overcome.

In verse 1, we read that in the right hand of God is a scroll, written on the front and back and sealed with seven seals. The prophet Ezekiel gives us some background. The Lord gave a scroll to Ezekiel with the decrees and prophecies that he was to proclaim. Ezekiel’s scroll was open and so could be received. But the contents of the scroll that John sees are yet to be disclosed. The seals must first be broken.

In the ancient world, messages were commonly written on scrolls. Important documents normally closed by listing witnesses, usually six in number. The scrolls were rolled and sealed shut with hot wax over the threads that tied the scroll closed. The sender of the message and the six witnesses (7) would press their personal seals into the hot wax, making an impression that matched their distinctive seal, authenticating it. No one could open the scroll without breaking the hardened wax seals, and no one could replace such seals without the witnesses’ rings. Seals reserved the contents of a document for its rightful recipient. Only that person had the authority to break the 7 seals.

So ... a search is made in heaven and on earth and under the earth for one worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. None are found. Not the 4 majestic creatures. Not the 24 elders. Angels, Archangels, Prophets of old, the Lord’s Apostles... no one worthy is found. All of heaven becomes silent. John begins to weep over the problem, and it is a major problem – one of enormous significance – for a scroll from God Himself must have an important message!

But John’s weeping does not last long. One of the 24 elders speaks to him: *“Do not weep! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed! He is able to open the scroll!”* (v. 5) One has prevailed over sin! One has conquered the Enemy! One has gained victory over death! One is Worthy! The Lion of Judah! He alone can break the seals, open the scroll, and bring the Father’s will to pass.

John immediately turns to see this Mighty One that has just been described to him. But he does not see a lion. He sees ... a lamb. And not just any lamb – one with *death wounds*.

What a shock it must have been for John to look for this lion who would rip the seals with his great claws, only to see a small wounded lamb. But it is *the Lamb* who walks up to the One seated on the throne and takes the scroll. Now, the Lamb is front and center in the throne room of heaven. He is declared worthy to break the seals. **Why is he Worthy?**

1. The Lamb Is Worthy because of His **Sovereignty** (vs. 1-5). “No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll ... See, the **Lion** of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

“Lion of the tribe of Judah” – In Genesis 49, Israel is promised that a great ruler will arise out of Judah. Like a lion, he will be powerful. With justice and might, he will conquer. He rules over all. He is Sovereign. He is Jesus.

In Revelation, Christ’s sovereign power is proclaimed on every page, every paragraph ... His voice, like rushing waters, proclaims: “I am the Alpha and Omega, the Almighty, the Son of God, the One who holds the key of David, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation, the Amen ... He has made it abundantly clear – *He has the Supremacy!* Christ’s victory over all the powers of darkness – his sinless life, his atoning death, his glorious resurrection – demonstrate his authority and ability to break the seals!

2. The Lamb Is Worthy because of His **Sinlessness** (v. 6). “Then I saw a **Lamb** ... standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.” In most instances throughout the NT, you will find the word *Amnos* used for lamb; but here, we find the word *Arnion*. John did not just see a lamb, he saw a “little lamb.” John was expecting a towering lion; he turns to see a tiny lamb.

Back in Exodus 12, we see the people of Israel instructed to select a perfect lamb to be offered as a sacrifice of substitution – if they were to live, a lamb had to die. And so, it had to be one without defect, one that was unblemished, a little lamb, the Passover lamb.

Jesus is the Passover Lamb – the one perfect, sinless sacrifice sent by the Father to deliver us from death itself! 1 Peter 1:18 – “For you know that ... you were redeemed from the empty way of life ... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

Back in the first chapter of John's Gospel, how does he introduce Jesus? He comes on the scene as John the Baptist is preparing the way. When the Baptizer sees Jesus, he exclaims: "*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Jn. 1:29) And with those words, the *identity* of the Messiah is disclosed – “the Lamb of God” – AND the *mission* of Messiah is disclosed – He will “take away the sin of the world.”

If Jesus had not been sinless, he could not be the lamb who takes away the sin of the world, and he would not be worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. But thanks be to God, He is the spotless Lamb, and He is Worthy!

3. *The Lamb Is Worthy because of His Submission* (v. 6a). “*I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain ...*” Jesus, the Holy Lamb of God, was not only the sinless sacrifice; he was a *willing* sacrifice! This lamb willingly came into a world that would hate, reject & crucify!

John knew this full well – he opened his Gospel with it: “*Though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but they did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*”

The Lamb is *worthy* to break the seals because he was *willing* to bear the cross ...

4. *The Lamb Is Worthy because of His Sacrifice* (v. 9). “*They sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe & language & people & nation.’*”

His sacrifice was prophesied in Isaiah 53 – “*He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*”

This Lamb bears the marks of having been slain. When we see Jesus in heaven, we will see the marks of his sacrifice for us. For all eternity, Jesus will bear the scars of the cross as a constant reminder of what He did for us. When we see him, we will see his sacrificial love on permanent display. And we will humbly and gratefully say, “Worthy is the Lamb!”

5. The Lamb Is Worthy because of His **Success** (11-12). “I heard the voice of many angels ... ten thousand times ten thousand ... they were saying: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

“Ten thousand” – the largest number readily available in Greek. The figure comes from Daniel 7:10, pointing to God’s infinite greatness, leading to the only fitting response: the praise of all His creatures! God alone merits the praise of all creation. Here, the Lamb who has overcome receives that praise – because He is God, eternal with the Father. [P]

It’s all about the Lamb ... but I want us to come back to the fact that one of the elders announces him as a Lion. Here we have a paradox – a seeming contradiction that may nonetheless be true. How can a lion be a lamb? The two are opposites. One is the hunter and the other the prey. One is placed in a cage with iron bars; the other in a petting zoo. The terms do not belong together – except in heaven. Here, the lion is the lamb. His *power* is found in his *death*. Because with his death, Christ accomplished the Father’s will and purchased our redemption. That is why He is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll.

But what does this strange imagery of the Lion being a Lamb teach us today?

1. *We can rest in the fact that **God’s strength is disguised as weakness**.* Look at the Lamb of God dying on the cross. Was there ever any greater appearance of weakness on the part of God? But in reality, what God was doing was the most powerful act that he would ever perform. Christ’s redemptive act on the cross was God at work in his greatest hour. We will never know, this side of heaven, what terrible struggles took place in the spiritual world between Palm Sunday and Easter morning. But one thing we do know: the Lamb became a Lion.

We are drawn to displays of strength; we desire to be seen on the winning side; but God is content with the appearance of weakness ... the way of the cross is one of suffering. [P] But what if following Christ always paid tremendous dividends? Everyone would flock to Jesus and follow him. People will do the things they benefit from personally. But where would people’s hearts be? Would they love God for himself, or for his provisions? Would they want God to use their lives, or would they want to use God for their own purposes?

What about a God who appears to be weak? What if it looks like evil is winning? What if people who follow Christ are mocked and belittled? What if it becomes a disadvantage to be a Christian? [P] Then only the people who love God for who He is will follow Him and live for Him. [P]

Think of the humility of God, coming to earth, taking on the form of a man. What power was hidden in this apparent weakness! Isaiah prophesied, *“He was oppressed and afflicted; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, he did not open his mouth”* (53:7). Such willingness to submit himself to weakness!

We are uncomfortable that Jesus asks us to join him in his weakness. Jesus says, *“The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”* (Matt. 23). Strength from weakness. 1 Pet. 2:21 – *“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps... When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly”*

The appearance of weakness is not a concern of God, for it is his strength. 1 Cor. 1:27 – *“God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”* Strength disguised as weakness.

2. *We can rest in the fact that **God has a plan**.* There is a scroll in God’s hand. It is written out, and it will be fulfilled. God has a plan and he is vigilantly carrying it out. History is headed somewhere. The scroll is written on both sides, from end to end, so that there is no room for anyone to add to plan of God.

The Bible is clear about what the plan is. Eph. 1:9 – *“He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were chosen in order that we might be for the praise of his glory.”* Here is God’s great plan for the world: *To bring unity to all things under Christ and that our lives will result in the praise of God’s glory.* God has a plan, and it will come to pass.

3. *We can rest in the fact that **God is in control**.* Sometimes we look around at the world and it seems like evil is winning, but the Lamb now has the scroll, and we know who wins in the end. Appearances are deceiving. Things are not always what they appear to be.

The lion is a lamb, but the lamb is also a lion.

But there is also something unique about the lamb who was slain. Look at the end of verse 6 again – *“The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”* Some of you thought I was just going to let this strange verse slip right by. So what does it mean?

Remember, Revelation is filled with imagery ... a spiritual picture of cosmic realities. The Lion of Judah. The Lamb that was slain. This is a spiritual portrait of WHO Jesus is. But then we get to the 7 horns and 7 eyes and 7 spirits. First, *the horns*. A horn in Scripture usually stands for power and authority. So the horns on the lamb symbolize the power and authority of Jesus. Next, *the eyes*. Like we saw with the 4 living creatures, a multitude of eyes points to the extensive scope of its sight. But there are specifically 7 horns & 7 eyes.

What do we know about the number 7? It represents fullness, completeness, perfection. So, the 7 horns and 7 eyes point to the Lamb’s perfection – that Jesus is the all-knowing, all-powerful God in the flesh who was slain for our sins. And since 7 means fullness, the *“seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth”* may very well symbolize the fullness of the Spirit of Christ – the Holy Spirit – sent out to dwell within all believers.

All of this reinforces the reality that *Christ is in control* ... even when it appears otherwise. But when the times reach their fulfillment, his rule will be unmistakable. Just when it looks as though the kingdom of God is on the ropes, Christ will come on the clouds. 2 Thes. 2:7 – *“For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work ... but then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.”*

But, you see, *not only does Christ ask us to share in his weakness, and share in his sufferings; he will also have us share in his victory!* Rev. 17:14, *“The Lamb will overcome ... because he is Lord of lords and King of kings — and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”*

So I want to say to you today: The struggle is worth it. The battle may be long and it may be weary. It may appear that you are losing. But keep leaning on Christ. And while this may appear to others to be weakness, it is your strength. And you will triumph in the end.

Christ says to Paul and us: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* So may we say along with Paul: *“I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s **power** may rest on me ... For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Cor. 12:10).

The Lamb is in the throne room of heaven – not in a manger, not on a dusty road in Galilee, not hanging in shame on a cursed cross, not lying dead in a sealed tomb. He is where He rightfully should be. He is exalted in eternal glory! [P] And because of his triumph over sin, Satan, and death itself – we have a living and eternal hope!

The Lion roars. The Lamb wins. And that is why He is Worthy!