

A Scroll, A Saviour & A Song

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Date: 21 June 2023

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, Revelation chapter 5.

Revelation chapter 5. And if we read again from verse 1. Where John says, 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.

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? You know, speaking to people about their soul, speaking to people about their soul, it can be very daunting and it can be very difficult.

But when we actually pluck up the courage to speak to someone about their soul, it can also be very interesting and very insightful in a way to find out where they're at with Christianity.

[1 : 21] And you know, over the past while, I've repeatedly come up against this barrier, this boundary, which seems to hold so many back in our congregation and even in our community.

And what holds them back, my understanding is, is this feeling of being unworthy. This feeling of being unworthy, where they explain and sometimes they emphasize to me that they feel unworthy. Some of them feel unworthy to come to church. Some of them feel unworthy to be a Christian, unworthy to be saved, unworthy to follow Jesus, unworthy to come to a prayer meeting, unworthy to profess their faith, unworthy to sit at the Lord's table.

So many people say to me that what holds them back is this feeling of being unworthy. And I start thinking, well, where do they get that from?

Is that the vibe that we give off as Christians? I hope not. Because none of us are worthy. We all know that, that none of us are worthy. Our salvation is all of grace.

[2 : 30] It's all a gift. It's all to the glory of God. But our salvation has been fully and freely given to unfit, unworthy, undeserving sinners such as we are.

And that salvation, it has been graciously and gloriously given and gifted to us by the one who is worthy. The one who is worthy.

And so whenever we hear someone saying to us that they feel unworthy or that they, that if you ever feel unworthy, because we often feel like that, we often feel unworthy.

But you know, our response should be, stop looking inwards and start looking upwards. Stop looking inwards.

We're so guilty of that. But start looking upwards. Because, you know, that's the book of, that's the message of the book of Revelation. Stop looking inwards.

[3 : 29] Start looking upwards. Start looking upwards. Because when we look upwards, we see a scroll, a saviour, and a song.

That's what we see as we look up this evening. So stop looking inwards. Start looking upwards. That's the message of Revelation chapter 5. Because when we look upwards, we see a scroll, a saviour, and a song.

A scroll, a saviour, and a song. So first of all, we see a scroll. A scroll. It says there in verse 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.

Now, as you know, the book of Revelation, it's one long revelation. It's not the book of Revelations, plural, but it's one revelation. And it's a revelation from Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ, for the church of Jesus Christ.

And it's for the church of Jesus Christ. Because the context of when it was first written, it was written in the first century, when the church was continuing to encounter violent persecution from

the Roman Empire.

[4 : 44] In fact, all of the apostles, you know that all of the apostles, they died a martyr's death due to the Roman Emperor. They were all executed for their faith, except for this man, except for the apostle John.

Because as you know, John, he wasn't executed by the emperor. John was exiled by the emperor to the Greek island of Pamos. But even there, the Lord still had this perfect plan and purpose for his beloved disciple, John.

Because while John was in exile on Pamos, and while he was engaging in prayer on the Lord's day, John was given this apocalypse, this apocalypse, this revelation, where the Lord, as we've said before, the Lord lifts the lid, and he pulls back the curtain, and he removes the veil in order to reveal this one who is worthy.

The one who is Jesus Christ, the risen ruling and reigning king, who is going to return. And you know, this revelation, it was important for the early church.

It was integral for the early church, because they needed to be reminded and reassured as a church, that in the midst of opposition, and in the midst of obstacles, even through persecution, that they were to remain focused.

[6 : 00] They were to remain fixated. They were to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, because he alone is the risen ruling and reigning king who is going to return.

You know, this revelation is calling us and commanding us to stop looking inward and start looking upward. It's calling us to lift our eyes heavenward, so that we live life with an eternal perspective. We're to live life with an eternal perspective, because the one seated upon his throne is sovereign. He's superior, and he is supreme in all things.

So stop looking inward. Start looking upward. Look to the one who's seated on his throne. Because that's what's been revealed in this chapter.

John has already told us, he told us in the previous chapter, chapter 4, that there is one seated upon this throne, and around the throne of heaven are 24 elders, and among them are four living creatures, and that day and night they never cease to say, Holy, Holy, Holy.

[7 : 15] They describe the one seated upon the throne. He is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. But John, he continues to describe what he sees in this revelation, this apocalypse, and he says in verse 1, Then I saw in the right hand, the right hand of him who was seated on the throne, a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

John saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who is sovereign, superior, and supreme. And the fact that John saw the scroll in his right hand shows us that the one who is seated on the throne was in a position of power.

Because whenever the right hand is mentioned in the Bible, it's always referring to a position of power. That's what we were just singing in Psalm 118. I don't know if you noticed.

Verses 15 and 16, they emphasize the right hand. Those well-known words, In dwellings of the righteous is heard the melody of joy and health. The Lord's right hand doth ever valiantly.

The right hand refers to a position of power. What's more is that we're given this detailed description of this scroll. Because this scroll is in the powerful right hand of the one who is seated on the throne.

[8 : 41] And we're told that there was writing on this scroll, but the writing is on both sides of the scroll. It's on, we're told, it's on within and on the back.

It's on the inside and the outside of the scroll. And that was important because a scroll in ancient writings, a scroll would usually only have writing on the inside.

Where when you roll up the scroll, you wouldn't be able to see what's on the outside. So a scroll would usually only have writing on the inside of the scroll.

But this scroll had writing on both sides of the scroll. And in his commentary, Joel Beakey, he writes, We need not be in doubt as to what this scroll represents.

From what follows, we know that it contains the eternal decrees of God. The scroll symbolizes for us God's plan.

[9 : 42] It's his purpose for the entire universe. And all creatures in all ages and all eternity is written therein.

It's his plan of sweet salvation and bitter judgment. And so when John saw a scroll in the powerful right hand of the one who is sovereign, supreme, superior, and seated upon the throne in heaven,

he saw a scroll which contained a complete and comprehensive plan of God's eternal decrees for this world.

You know, it ought to remind us immediately, when we hear the word decrees, it ought to remind us of the question in the catechism. What are the decrees of God? What are the sovereign plans and purposes of God?

What are his commands? What has God decreed? And the catechism tells us the decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his own will, whereby for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

And how does God execute his decrees, asks the catechism. Well, God executes his decrees in the works of creation. And the works of providence. And you know, I love what John saw here, because he saw the one seated on his throne, he's sovereign, superior, supreme, he's seated on the throne in heaven, and he's holding a perfect plan.

[11 : 24] He's holding a perfect plan. There is writing inside, there is writing on the outside. It's a perfect plan. And everything that's written on this perfect plan is inspired.

It's infallible and it's inerrant. It's a perfect plan. It's a plan where there are no omissions. It's a plan where there are no oversights.

It's a plan where there are no additions to be put into it. No amendments to be made. No alterations to be added to it. It was a perfect plan which had every detail and every decree of the perfect purpose and providence of the one who was seated on the throne.

Do you know what's amazing is that inside this plan, it's said that not even a hair could or would fall from our head without this perfect plan.

Every birth, every death has been appointed according to his perfect plan. Every sickness, every suffering, every sorrow, every separation was written in this perfect plan.

[12 : 37] Every failure was foreseen. Every disappointment was described. Every disaster, even as was mentioned in prayer, is in detail. Every persecution was prescribed.

Every atom was accounted for. Every particle was pinpointed. Every molecule was moved according to his perfect plan. My friend, nothing. It's the amazing thing.

Nothing in this entire world has ever been left to chance or coincidence. No, everything was written in this scroll. Everything was in the plan.

And it was being held in the powerful right hand of the one who was sovereign, superior, supreme, and seated upon his throne in heaven. And you know, is that not what we teach our children?

We teach them that the one in heaven, he has the whole world in his hands. He has the whole world in his hands. And that's what John is seeing.

[13 : 37] He has seen the one who is sovereign, superior, and supreme, seated on his throne with a scroll in his right hand. Everything is in the scroll.

Which is why the angel is asking, Who is worthy? Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals? And I know that we're all looking at this and thinking, Well, we are completely and utterly unworthy.

Which brings us secondly to look up and see a saviour. We're to stop looking inwards. We're to start looking upwards.

Because when we look upwards, we see a scroll in his powerful right hand. But beside him, we see a saviour. A saviour. That's what we see secondly, a saviour.

John says, 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. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

[14 : 45] And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep loudly, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

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.

So as we said, this seal, this scroll, it was a sovereign scroll. It contains the perfect plan. It contains the perfect purpose, the perfect providence of the one who was sovereign, superior, supreme and seated upon his throne.

But we're also told that this sovereign scroll was not only rolled up and closed, it was sealed shut. This sovereign scroll was sealed.

And as you know, an ancient seal was often made with wax. The wax often had the imprint of a signet ring to set the seal and to secure the scroll from being opened and read.

[15:59] But this sovereign scroll, it was sealed with not one, but we're told seven seals. The sovereign scroll was sealed with seven seals. Now we're familiar with the number seven in this revelation because John has already told us about seven lampstands and seven stars and seven angels and seven spirits and seven churches.

And in a moment, he's going to see seven horns and seven eyes. But on this sovereign scroll, John sees seven seals. Seven seals.

And as we said before, seven is the number of perfection. Therefore, the only one who is worthy to open this sovereign scroll with its seven seals is one who is perfect.

The only one who can break the seven seals of this scroll, who is in the powerful hand of the one who is seated upon the throne in heaven, is one who is perfect.

The only one who can execute the decrees of the perfect plan of God is one who is perfect. Which is why the angel asks the question, who is worthy?

[17:11] Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? But of course, the angel asking the question, it knows the answer. For John, who's looking and learning though, he sees there's no one.

There's no one in heaven. He says there's no one on earth. There's no one under the earth who is worthy to break the seven seals and open this sovereign scroll. There's no one. And we're told that John weeps. Verse 4, I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

My friend, John wept. John wept because he knew that if salvation was left up to us, if salvation was left up to us, there would be no salvation at all.

There would be no redemption. There would be no reconciliation with God. No restoration. No resurrection. There would be no reward. There would be nothing. Absolutely nothing.

We would make an absolute mess of it because we are completely and utterly unworthy and unable to secure our salvation. You know, I love what one commentator writes about John.

[18:21] He says, John's heart is broken. John's heart is broken by the realization that no one of Adam's fallen race is worthy.

So tell that to your unconverted friend. No one of Adam's fallen race is worthy. We're all unworthy. He weeps because he knows that there will be no salvation for God's people, no coming of God's kingdom, and no hope for the human race unless someone can accomplish the purposes of God and fulfill his promises.

And here's John. John is weeping because no one was worthy to open the scroll. John wept because no one was worthy to open the scroll.

And you know, it made me think, if John wept at this vision, what makes you weep? What is it that makes you weep?

Do you ever weep? Do I ever weep? Or do we only ever show the stoicism of a stiff upper lip? And yet when we read through our Bible, we see the Lord's people were always expressive.

[19:40] They were always, they always showed emotion. They wept over the death of their leaders. They wept over the lostness, their lostness in the wilderness. And we sing in Psalm 137, by Babel streams, they sat and wept when Zion they thought on.

Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. Peter wept when he had denied Jesus three times. Paul wept over the chaos and the confusion that reigned in the church.

But my friend, what makes you weep? What makes you weep? Does your sin ever make you weep? Do lost souls make you weep?

Does your family make you weep? Does the state of our nation make you weep? What makes you weep? Or are we just so stoic and stiff upper lipped?

Are we too casual in our Christianity, too consumeristic, too careless in our Christianity to weep? What makes you weep? I look at John and I think, well, what makes me weep?

[20:50] If John saw that we are so unworthy to open the scroll, what makes us weep? What makes you weep? But you know, one of the elders, he comes to John and he says, 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. Weep no more, he says.

Weep no more. Stop looking inward. Start looking upward. Weep no more. One of the elders, he comforts John. He consoles John's weeping by saying, there is one and he is worthy. There is one who is worthy and he is Jesus. And he's the Lion King. He's Jesus, the Lion King. I'm sure we're all familiar with the 90s Disney animation. I'm sure the children have probably watched it. We're familiar with the Lion King. But here John sees the true Lion King. Because he's a lion, we're told. He's the lion from the tribe of Judah. [21 : 52] He's a descendant of the tribe of Judah. He's also the root of David, who was the covenant king. So he's a Lion King. He's the conquering king.

He's the covenant king. But what's remarkable about this Lion King is that this Lion King, we go on to see that the Lion King is slain.

The Lion King is slain. We're told in verse 6, So John not only sees a scroll with seven seals, he also sees a saviour.

A saviour with seven horns and seven eyes. Which of course, as you know, it's not literal language. It's all symbolic. It's figurative language. We know that because while Jesus was on earth, he didn't have seven horns and he didn't have seven eyes.

But in this revelation, we're told that the saviour of sinners, he's revealed to us as one with strength and one with sovereignty. He is a saviour with strength and sovereignty.

[23 : 11] The horn is a symbol of strength. The eyes are a symbol of sovereignty. And as we said, the number seven is the number of perfection. So it is perfect strength and perfect sovereignty in the saviour.

More than that, John not only tells us that he sees the Lion King, but he also sees the Lamb. He's a lion lamb. He's the Lamb of God.

So he's the Lion King. He's the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David. But he's also the Lamb. The Lamb standing as though it had been slain.

And the thing is, John, as an apostle, as a Jew, he would have been well versed in Old Testament scripture to know that this scene of a lamb slain, it was an echo of Abraham on Mount Moriah, where Abraham said to Isaac, that God will provide himself as a lamb for a burnt offering.

It also spoke of the Passover lamb, where they covered the lintel and the doorposts with the blood of the Passover lamb in order to bring salvation to the Israelites. It also reminded John of Isaiah's prophecy that the servant would be led as a lamb to the slaughter.

[24 : 30] And John had seen it all. He'd learned about it as a child. He'd read about it for himself. And he also heard about it, reaching its climax and culmination when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And you know, that's why we're to stop looking inwards and start looking upwards. That's why we're to look to the one who is worthy to take the scroll and open it.

Because he's the Lion King. He's the Lamb of God. He's the sinless and spotless Lion Lamb. And we're to look to him. We're not to look inward because we are utterly unworthy.

But we are to look upwards to the one who is worthy. And you know, when we do, when we do, we will respond like the multitudes in heaven responded.

When we stop looking inward and start looking upward, we will respond with a song. That's what we see lastly. We will respond with a song.

[25 : 42] We see a scroll, a saviour, and a song. A scroll, a saviour, and a song. Look at verse 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 of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

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. And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth. Then I looked and heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

You know, John's revelation of heaven is a picture of praise. When John stops looking inwards and starts looking upwards, all he sees is a picture of praise.

[27 : 01] Because as he watches and witnesses this Lion Lamb of heaven take the scroll out of the powerful right hand of the one who is sovereign, superior, supreme, and seated on his throne, as he watches this, and as he witnesses what the Lion Lamb is doing, the congregation respond.

Those who are gathered around the throne of heaven, we're told that they respond in praise. They respond in praise. And what's remarkable, we're told there in verse 9, is that they sang a new song. They sang a new song. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were exhorted and encouraged to sing a new song to the Lord in anticipation of the Lion Lamb coming in his kingdom.

We see that, and we sang it in Psalm 96. The psalmist said, Oh, sing a new song to the Lord. Sing praises to his name and his salvation day by day.

Let all the earth proclaim. We'll sing it in a moment from Psalm 98. Oh, sing a new song to the Lord for wonders he hath done. His right hand and his holy arm him victory hath won.

[28 : 14] Those psalms, they're encouraging us to sing a new song in anticipation of the coming kingdom of this Lion Lamb. But here in heaven, in John's revelation, with this picture of praise, as he looks up to the one who is worthy, this congregation around the throne of heaven, they're not singing a new song in anticipation of the Lion Lamb coming in his kingdom.

They're singing a new song in adoration of the climax and the culmination of the kingdom of this Lion Lamb, where he is going to bring it all to its conclusion.

And because of this, the Lion Lamb, he's not only at the center of heaven, John's is telling us he is the center of heaven.

All of heaven is focused on him. Every eye is looking towards him. All the worshipers surrounding him are looking at him.

He is their focus. He is the one they're fixated with. He is the one who has been faithful to them.

And so they're looking at him. The all of heaven has a focus upon him.

[29 : 32] And you know, Joel Beakey, I love his commentary on this, he says, John sees a Christocentric universe. John sees a Christocentric universe.

where everything in our lives revolves around him. Everything in the church revolves around him. Everything in the whole universe revolves around him.

He is the center of the throne of heaven. And he is worthy. Every eye is looking at him because he is worthy.

They sang a new song saying, worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals for you were slain 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.

They are that royal priesthood and they shall reign on the earth. Then I looked, he says, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures, the elders, the voice of many angels numbering myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, do you know, you can't even imagine it.

[30 : 54] Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

it's a picture of praise. It's a picture of praise and as we continue our study in this revelation, as we go into the next chapter, God willing, next week, we'll see that there is reason to rejoice.

There's more reason to worship the Lord because he alone is worthy to break each and every seal and open the scroll and read what is therein.

And that's what we read. I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them saying, their focus is one way, to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever.

And the four living creatures said, Amen. and the elders fell down and worshipped. It blows your mind, doesn't it?

[32 : 06] That this is what John saw. But John saw it to tell us, stop looking inward. Start looking upward. Stop looking inward because you'll only find an unworthy sinner.

Start looking upward to the one who is worthy. Worthy to open the scroll and break every seal. So keep looking to him, to the one who is worthy.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word.

And Lord, we realise that all thy word is so precious. that it gives to us a glimpse of glory. And how, as thy word says, that I hath not seen, nor ear heard what has entered into the heart of man.

And yet, Lord, what thou hast prepared for us. We bless and praise thee for the wonder of glory. And we thank thee for that revelation that we've just been reading. Been reminded of the thousands of thousands, the myriads and myriads of angels gathering around the throne and the lamb, worshipping and singing that new song to the Lord for wonders he hath done.

[33 : 31] O Lord, help us, we pray, as thy people in this world to stop looking inward and to start looking upward. And Lord, we pray that even those whom we speak to, those whom we work with, those who see themselves as so unworthy to come to Jesus, that they too would stop looking inward and start looking upward to the one who is worthy, the one who is slain for us, the one who has opened that new and living way whereby we are able to come.

Do us good then we pray, go before us, cleanse us we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Now we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening.

we're going to sing in Psalm 98. Psalm 98 in the Scottish Psalter page 360. We're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked 4.

Psalm 98 it says, O sing a new song to the Lord for wonders he hath done his right hand and his holy arm him victory hath won the Lord God his salvation hath caused to be known his justice in the heathen sight he openly hath shown.

We'll sing on down to the verse marked 4 of Psalm 98 to God's praise. O sing a new song to the Lord for wonders he hath done his right hand In victory I've won.

[35 : 36] The Lord for His salvation hath caused it to be known.

His justice in the hidden sight He openly adjoes.

He mindful of His grace and truth to Israel's house of pain and the salvation of our God for the ends of the earth have seen.

Let all the earth unto the Lord send forth the joyful noise.

Lift up your voice. All right to Him sing praises and rejoice.

[37 : 23] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.