

Revelation 5:1-14

Easter 3, May 1, 2022
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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.

Tuesday, September 8th, 1999. Busch Stadium, 4th inning. One swing of the bat and the crowd erupts. Mark McGwire connects—homerun number 62—and the crowd went wild. Cheers, fireworks, clapping, hugging, smiles, excitement—an incredible night. What a celebration that was! And it wasn't just in St. Louis, but all around the country, that homerun race between Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa had captured the imaginations of baseball fans everywhere. It was front page news, the first story on every sports news broadcast—an event that some even say saved baseball. The cover of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch the next day had one word printed across the top in big, bold letters: JUBILATION. And that's exactly what it was! I was only seven at the time, so the thought of envy or jealousy didn't even cross my mind, as far as I can recall. The only thing I remember feeling was excitement, and awe, and *wishing* that I had been there too, maybe even catching that ball.

That's how it is for us. We love watching celebrations, we love that jubilation, but what we love even more is if we can be in it. Be a part of it. To be among that crowd experiencing that delirious joy firsthand. There are very few feelings like that. Well, if you missed the celebration of that record-setting homerun, here's your opportunity to join an even greater celebration. You can join in the celebration of heaven, because in the words of our theme:

Here's *Your* Invitation for Jubilation, because:

- I. The Lamb who was slain is worthy
- II. The ransomed can rejoice as worthy

Now, I've always thought that a championship celebration just has to be much more joyful for the fans of the little guy, for the underdog. If the Dodgers go spend \$300 million dollars and buy a championship, there will be celebration, but it just can't quite reach the fever pitch that comes when an underdog wins. Like in 2006, you probably remember that year's 83-win Cardinals, by far the team with the worst regular season record to make the playoffs that year. They barely even qualified for the post-season, and yet they went on to win it all. The national media counted them out, and in the end, your Cardinals proved them wrong. And that is the type of underdog champion that you can really celebrate. When against all odds a team prevails, that's cause for real jubilation.

And looking at this scene in heaven, we see a real celebration. A choir sings, massive—of angels, living creatures, saints, elders—you name them, they're there. And the hymn is loud, drowning out all other sounds. Over and over this hymn of praise is sung for the Lamb who was slain. Over and over and over, everyone falls down and worships. And what's the cause for such pandemonium? Well, this is the ultimate underdog victory, the kind that brings out the most fervor, the type of jubilation that can simply go on and on and on without ever getting old. And the text shows us why.

Here, the Apostle John is given this glorious vision of the throne room of heaven, except, for a second, it appeared to be more of a nightmare. John writes, ***"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."***

What's so special about this scroll? Well, in short, this is God's plan. This is His *full* plan; note how the scroll is written on both front and back, suggesting the completeness of its message. If you have a question about how it will all turn out, you will find the answer here! The scroll represents God's ultimate plan for the future, His plan for judgment and His plan of salvation. And really, those *are* answers that all people are looking for, what's going to happen next.

When John recorded this vision from God, the book of Revelation, he was living in an era of unbridled persecution towards Christians. God's Revelation to him most likely came during the reign of Nero, the Roman Emperor who made sport of hunting down and killing Christians in a variety of ways—crucifying them, burning them, making their deaths a theatric spectacle that you could buy tickets to, even using their bodies as torches in his garden at night. And John had been exiled to a small island called Patmos, to live out his days in disgraced solitude, all for preaching in the name of Jesus. You can imagine the questions that were on the minds of Christians in those days, especially John's.

And don't we have the same sorts of questions today? As we see outright hatred towards Christians in every corner of our country, much less the world? As we see the will of God mocked and ridiculed and disposed of? As we see ungodly lifestyles raised as up as virtuous? As we see war spreading in Europe, seemingly without end? As we see the prices of gas and housing and everything else skyrocketing? As we see the ideals of socialism advance unimpeded through our universities and nation? Oh yes, we have questions. When does it all end? How will we get through this? What are you going to do about this, God? What is your plan? If only, *if only* we could open this scroll and read for ourselves!

And yet, that's the problem. That is why John weeps loudly in heaven's halls. He's looking for the answers too! And yet, no one is worthy to open the scroll and read God's plan. None are worthy. None are worthy to open the scroll, none are worthy to enter heaven, none are worthy to stand before God. We like to think that we might be worthy of these things. We might think that attending Lenten services or Bible Classes can make us right before God, as we sacrificed our free time to do so. Just having observed Good Friday, we might think that sympathizing with the physical agony of Jesus on the cross can make us worthy, as if this emotional experience makes us right with God. We might think that so long as we go through the motions of repentance, that makes us right with God! It does not. None of it does. We are not worthy either. And if no one can answer the angel's challenge and open this scroll, then mankind has no future and no hope. *We* have no future and no hope. And then this bright, glorious vision of heaven into which John has been allowed to gaze will remain forever hidden from our eyes. So, John weeps.

Until one does answer the challenge. ***"Weep no more;"*** John was told, ***"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."*** Finally, here is someone who can open the scroll! And yet, when John looks, He doesn't see a conquering lion. ***"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. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne."*** And because of this Lamb, all of creation sings.

Now, a lot of sports teams are named after animals: Hawks, Wolverines, Tigers, Lions. But you're going to be hard-pressed to find a team named "the Lambs." That type of name just doesn't instill any sort of fear in the competition. A crowd will not be whipped into a fervor by a lamb mascot. And yet, here is a Lamb doing just that—a Lamb bearing the wounds of death, by the way. How could an injured Lamb prompt such praise? How could a Lamb be worthy to open the scroll?

Well, you know who this Lamb is. This is the one identified by John the Baptist as ***"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*** (John 1:29) This is the Lamb that ***"was led to the slaughter."*** (Acts 8:32) There, on the darkest of days, on a hill outside Jerusalem, this Lamb was crucified, the conclusion of a masterful plot of Satan and his minions. And how the devil must have celebrated, how the church leaders rejoiced—Jesus was finally out of the picture! Until He wasn't. Because then that Lamb stood up from the grave—the world had counted Him out, even His own disciples thought this was the end—and He came out victorious. Yes, Christ the Heavenly Lamb snatched victory out of the jaws of defeat. This was the ultimate underdog victory. God won, the devil lost, jubilation ensues.

This is why the heaven's sing, because **The Lamb who was slain is worthy**. And you also are invited to join the jubilation, because you, the ones whom He has ransomed, can also **rejoice, as now you are worthy** too. Now, I'm the type of guy that when I talk about my favorite sports teams, I always say "us" and "we." Like when my Milwaukee Bucks won the NBA Finals, I said, "We won! I can't believe we did it!" That annoys some people. Saying "we" and "us," you know, lumping yourself together with the team. People will say, "We? I didn't see you out on the court." And I suppose that's true, but when you root for a team it really feels like you're a part of it, even if you really are not. Well, here is a victory celebration in which God invites you to lump yourself in with as part of the team.

You see, usually in Scripture when God is speaking about sheep, He is talking about us—the sheep who foolishly go their own way, the sheep who depend on a Shepherd for protection, the sheep for whom the Shepherd had to lay down His own life. But seeing our Savior described as the Lamb who was slain, we’re reminded that the eternal Son of God became like one of us, so that we might be like Him. We’re reminded that in His resurrection, He claimed this victory *for* us. Yes, it’s true, today we can declare, ***“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:57) We are the ones whose robes have been washed and made ***“white in the blood of the Lamb.”*** (Revelation 7:14)

No, we’re not worthy to open the scroll of God’s plans for us. But Jesus has opened it to reveal what God has in store for you. As He says through the prophet Jeremiah, ***“I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*** (Jeremiah 29:11) We know that when we leave this vale of tears, that ***“there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”*** (2 Timothy 4:8) Even as we look around us and see wars and persecution and rising gas prices and rampant ungodliness—we can remember that we are just strangers here. But God has prepared for us a home in heaven. We will be there in this glorious scene, joining in the jubilation with all the saints and elders and living creatures and angels—yes, you will be there too.

But this isn’t just a celebration in the future that you can only look forward to. You can start singing right now, because the Lamb’s reign has already begun! Consider this: As Jesus ascended to this position of glory, He was exalted *as the Lamb who was slain*. He was exalted as the one who was crucified. And this is important! The one who is exalted is the one who was humbled to the point of death on a cross. The one who holds all authority in His hands is the one whose hands were pierced for your transgressions. The one who is right now reigning as the King of kings is also then the one who loves you more than you could ever imagine. As John records that His wounds are still visible in heaven, this is to remind you that the reason that He went to receive those wounds—meaning you and me—we’re still on His mind. So, the victory, it’s really ours right now.

Now, I know that it’s easy to read through Revelation and come away wondering, “What did I just read?” With all the different creatures and elders and numbers being thrown around, it can be confusing. But I think you can get the gist of it. A couple months ago I was watching Star Wars: The Return of the Jedi with my sons, and they asked me to read the intro, you know, when the words start scrolling across the screen. And after I finished, my son Matthew said, “I don’t know what we just read, but let’s just say that the bad guys are losing.” And he was right. And if that’s all you got out of this text from Revelation, you’d be correct too. The message is clear: the bad guys are losing, the Lamb has won. He’s won for you! And He’s won for me. And for that reason, we’ve won too. We have the eternal joys of heaven to look forward to, and none of the questions of this life can keep us from it. So today, we can join the jubilation with song, ***“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”*** Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.