



I hold in my hand a scroll. It's probably not quite like anything you've seen before. If I were to open it, it would be about ten feet long. It's tied with string and sealed across with seven seals. On the inside there is a lot of writing. As you can see there is also writing on the back.

I would like you to use your imagination for a minute. Imagine that inside of this scroll is a story, not just any old story, but the story of your life. Not only does it contain all that's happened in your life up until now, it also contains all that will happen to you in the future. Most of us, if we had access to a scroll like that, would want to open it and see what it says. We might be a little afraid. There might be some things in there we could hardly bear to read.

But keep imagining with me. What if I told you that the story this scroll told would be a story of joy, of victory, of blessing; it's like every wild and wonderful dream you've ever had comes true in this story.

But there is just one problem. In order for this story to come true, in order for your life to unfold along these wonderful lines, someone has to come along and open these seals. If the seals aren't opened, the story can't be read. If the story isn't read, it won't be lived; it won't come true. In a way, this scroll is like a will. Unless someone opens the will and reads it, you can't have what it promises. And this is a real problem because these seals are not easy to open. I know they look easy, but they're very strong. It will take someone of super human strength to open these seals. No one has ever been able to do it.

If you can feel the disappointment, if you can feel the sense of frustration and even helplessness of wanting to open that scroll, then you can understand what the apostle John felt like.

In Revelation 5 John has been led by the Spirit of God into a visionary experience of the throne room of heaven. We saw last week how he described the One who sits on the throne as well as the heavenly beings that surround the throne: the 24 elders and the four living creatures. It's a beautiful and glorious scene where the four living creatures sing, "*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God the Almighty...*" and the 24 elders fall down and cast their crowns before him, crying out, "*Worthy are you, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power...*"

## **The Scroll, the Lamb, and the New Song**

### **The scroll**

But then in chapter 5 John notices something he hadn't seen before. He saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll. All of a sudden, that scroll was the object of John's attention. He noticed it was different than most scrolls of his day because there was writing on both sides. It was also sealed with seven seals. In John's day, wax seals like this were put on royal decrees, wills and other official documents. The writer would stamp his own imprint in the wax. These seals guaranteed the contents were valid and hadn't been tampered with. It was also understood that only a properly authorized person could open the seals and read the scroll.

In this case that was a problem. John hears the loud voice of a strong angel asking, "*Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?*" That's a good question. That's the right question to ask. Not just anybody is authorized to open this scroll. And so a search begins. This is quite a search! They search heaven. No one is found. They search all over the earth. No one is found. They even search under the earth. But no one is found who is worthy to open the scroll and read it. This is a problem; a **big** problem. It was a problem so big and so significant that John begins to weep. He's not just sniffing; he's "*weeping greatly.*" He can't control himself. He's heaving and sobbing. This is a little strange. People don't cry in heaven! Remember that old song: "Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with his glory and his grace. I want to see my Savior's face, heaven is a wonderful place." But things aren't so wonderful up there for John. He's really upset. No one can open the scroll!

This begs the question: what's in that scroll and why is it so important to open the seals and read it? There are a lot of views on this and I don't have time to go into all of them. But let me give you a concise explanation of what this scroll represents: this scroll describes the future dealings of God in history. It's a sealed record of God's plan for the future. It contains God's future program for establishing his kingdom. That program includes both the judgment of all who oppose him and the salvation of all who worship him. For the follower of Christ, it's a story of joy and victory and blessing.

With that in mind, you can understand why John is so upset. If no one is found who is worthy to open the seals, then God's plan can't be put into motion. The assumption here is that the world as it is now is out of order. The earth is in rebellion against God. In the rest of Revelation, we'll see how the dragon installs the beast upon his earthly throne, and the false prophet deceives mankind into worshipping the beast rather than God. But the scroll declares that God will act to make things right. He'll judge the dragon, the false prophet, and the beast and all who worship him. But for that to happen those seals must be broken. Someone must be found who is worthy to put all of this in motion. John weeps because no one has been found and maybe things won't ever be made right.

There is a view of history that's like this—hopeless. We look around and we see how twisted this world is. People killing each other. Kids gather for a gang rape like it's a soccer game. Executives raking in billion dollar bonuses while children starve to death in Africa. Disease. Divorce. Famine. Abuse. Addiction. Pollution. Crime. The list goes on. Unless we believe that someone can come along and turn things around and make things right, we're left like John, weeping.

### The lamb

But as if out of nowhere John hears someone speak. One of the elders says to John, *"Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the scroll and its seven seals."* It's like he's saying, "Dry your tears, John. If anyone is able to open the seals, it's this lion!"

But why? Why is this lion authorized? The answer is found in Israel's history; their expectation for Messiah. Way back in the book of Genesis, when Jacob gave a blessing to each of his sons, he likened Judah to a lion, saying, *"Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet..."* (Gen 49:9-10). Jacob refers to two aspects of the lion: his power in devouring prey, and his kingly authority. That's why we call the lion the king of the beasts. It's no surprise King David and his descendants came from the tribe of Judah, especially combined with the other thing the elder says about him. He's from *"the root of David."* This term was used by the prophet Isaiah to show how the Messiah would come from David's family. Isaiah described his rule this way, *"With righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked"* (11:4). The Jews of Jesus' day were longing for God to send this Messiah, a mighty, lion-like king who would go into battle, overthrow Israel's enemies, restoring her to greatness.

You can see why this lion would be qualified to open the scroll. If anyone has what it takes it's this lion. He has all the power and all the credentials. The elder even says here that this lion *"has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."* The battle has been fought; the victory has been won. He's earned the right to open the seals.

But wait! What John sees next doesn't quite fit with what the elder had announced. Instead of a lion, he sees a lamb. The lamb is standing (alive), but he's standing as one who has been slain. Not a real impressive sight, but somehow the lion and the lamb are one in the same. The lion he hears about is in fact the Lamb he sees. What a contrast: a conquering lion and a slain lamb. Here's a great paradox. The lion has triumphed and conquered. But that victory has been accomplished through the Lamb being slain. Notice the lamb also has seven horns and seven eyes. The horns are a symbol of his power. The eyes are identified as the *"seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth,"* a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit who is sent forth by Christ into the world.

Why was the Lamb slain? The Old Testament pointed towards this image. Each year the Israelites killed a lamb on Passover, to remember that God had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and won a great victory over Pharaoh. Because of the slain blood of the Passover lamb, the Lord passed over his people, protecting them from his judgment. Later, God instituted the sacrificial system, accepting the death of animal sacrifices as atonement for sin. But that's not all. The prophet Isaiah also spoke of someone to come called "the servant of the Lord." He said of him, *"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth."* Later he says, *"By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities"* (Is 53:7,11). Of course, we know that all of this points to Jesus Christ. John the Baptist called him *"the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."* From here on, "the Lamb" will be John's favorite title for Jesus, a title he uses 28 times. In Revelation, we're never allowed to forget that Jesus is the Lamb.

John sees the Lamb approach the One on the throne and take the scroll from his right hand. With a huge sigh of relief we're ready for the opening of the seals. This is what we've been waiting for! What will this scroll reveal? But, wait, we're still not shown what's inside the scroll. Before the Lamb opens the first seal John describes something else. He pauses before the opening of the first seal. There are several pauses like that in Revelation. There will also be a pause before the blowing of the first of seven trumpets, and before the pouring out of the first of seven bowls. These pauses are important. They show what's going on in heaven while these terrible judgments are taking place on earth. The focus of these pauses is worship around the throne and the lamb.

## The new song

The response of the creatures in heaven to the Lamb taking the scroll is to fall down and worship. In chapter 4 we had two songs of worship addressed to the one seated on the throne. Now in chapter 5 we have two songs addressed to the Lamb, followed by a song addressed to both. First, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fall down in worship and sing a new song. There's something new to sing about. They proclaim the Lamb is worthy to take the scroll. He's able to unlock the mystery whereby God will bring to pass the things which must happen. He's able to do so not because of his power, but because he was slain. By being slain he purchased men and women of every tribe, nation, language and people. He would redeem more than just Israel; he would redeem people from every race and every tribe and every nation. And he wouldn't just redeem them; he would make them a kingdom and priests who would one day reign on the earth.

Then John sees countless angels adding their song. The four creatures and the elders acclaimed the Lamb as worthy to receive the scroll. The angels intensify the worship, acclaiming the Lamb as worthy to receive praise. Nothing is held back. Notice seven things are mentioned: *"power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."* Jesus is worthy to receive all of this because he's overcome.

Finally, every creature in every realm joins in, offering their worship to both the one seated on the throne and the Lamb. This is extraordinary! There is only one God, but Father and Son are together worshiped. Here in Revelation we see a very high understanding of the person of Jesus. The Lamb isn't one of the worshipers. He's worshiped! There could be no more powerful statement of the deity of Jesus Christ than this.

The four cherubim round out the chorus of praise by adding their *"Amen."* It was they who started the worship in 4:8, and it's they who bring it to a close.

## Jesus is worthy of worship because through His death He's overcome all that stands against the plan and purposes of God

All of this tells us one very important truth: Jesus is worthy of worship because through his death he's overcome all that stands against the plan and purposes of God. The central affirmation of this chapter is in v.5, *"Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that's from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."* How has he overcome? Through his death. I'd like for you to see this as a personal word to you this morning. Stop weeping! What are you weeping about? What's causing you to despair? What's defeating you? What has you in the vice grip of fear? Listen to the words of the elders: "Stop weeping! The lion has overcome! The lamb is slain! Instead of weeping, you should be worshipping!"

## He's overcome sin, death and the devil

Consider what he's overcome. He's overcome sin. Sin separates us from God. He removed our sin as far as the east is from the west. He overcame death. Hebrews talks about how we're subject to lifelong bondage through the fear of death (Heb. 2:14,15). But Paul says he *"abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"* (2 Tim. 1:10). He overcame the devil. Right before he went to the cross Jesus said, *"Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out"* (Jn.12:31). Later he said, *"the ruler of this world has been judged"* (Jn. 16:11). This victory over Satan includes the entire host of demonic powers. Paul wrote through the cross God *"disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him"* (Col. 2:15). When you think of all of this, why not worship instead of weep? If God is for us, who can be against us? There is nothing that can happen to you that will thwart the plan and purpose of God in your life, because the lion from the tribe of Judah overcame it all.

Consider what happened to a 12-year-old Ethiopian girl. Seven men abducted her. The men held the girl for seven days, beating her repeatedly. This is common in Ethiopia, as men band together to abduct young girls for the purpose of securing a bride. The girls are typically beaten into submission and raped. In this instance, there wasn't a human being within earshot to hear the cries of this girl. But her cries were heard. The unlikely heroes were three majestic Ethiopian lions. Famous for their large black manes, these lions are the national symbol of the country. In response to the girl's cries, three lions leapt from the brush and chased her captors away. They then formed a protective perimeter around her. A half-day later, when the police arrived, the lions simply stood up and walked away. One official said, "They stood guard until we found her, and then they just left her like a gift and went back into the forest." This 12-year-old girl was powerless to change her situation. Her deliverance had to come from a power greater than herself. In the same way, we're powerless to save ourselves from sin and death. Our only hope is in Christ, the Lion of Judah. But he has come and he has chased all our captors away.

## He's overcome not through strength but weakness

But here is the amazing thing—the way he's overcome isn't through strength but through weakness. It's not a lion John sees but a lamb. The lion is all about strength and power. The Lamb is all about meekness, helplessness, submission. In Revelation the Lamb was slain for his faithful witness to God. Later in Revelation we'll meet two witnesses who are instrumental in defeating the dragon and the beast. But how do they do that? How do they bring the evil rule of the beast to an end? Not by acting like a lion, but by acting like a lamb. The witnesses follow in the footsteps of Jesus and are killed for their faithful witness. But just as they

followed Jesus into death, they also follow him into new life. We're called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, bearing faithful witness. We could meet death as well, but we're also assured of new life. Unfortunately, too often the church has behaved like a lion. We think we can overcome by a show of strength. We carry the cross in one hand and a sword in the other. But that's not how we overcome. We overcome not by force but through sacrifice and weakness. It's true in our personal lives as well. Do you embrace strength or weakness? If you embrace the former, God will oppose you; he will break you down; he will humble you. In strength we depend on ourselves; in weakness we depend on God. In strength we try to assert ourselves; in weakness we humble ourselves.

I heard a story about nine disabled competitors running the 100 yard dash at a recent Seattle Special Olympics. One of the boys stumbled and began to cry. When that happened, each of the other eight competitors stopped and returned to comfort him. A girl with Down's Syndrome even gave him a kiss. Then all of them crossed the finish line arm in arm. The crowd gave a standing ovation for ten minutes. By embracing weakness and letting go of personal victory, those children achieved a greater victory. That's how we achieve victory. Not by a show of strength, but by weakness.

#### **He's overcome for every tribe, tongue and nation**

Notice also this victory that he's won isn't just for one group of people but for every tribe and tongue and nation. No one sings a solo; we sing together. There is no room here at all for any kind of segregation. We lift one voice.

Tony Evans says, "Racism isn't a bad habit; it's not a mistake; it's a sin. The answer isn't sociology; it's theology." Billy Graham grew up on a small southern farm where he didn't think twice about the racism that was part and parcel of living in the south in those days. But once he saw in passages like this that every tribe and tongue and nation will join together he took down the ropes that separated blacks and whites in a southern crusade in 1952. From that day on, he refused to ever preach at a segregated crusade.

This past week, Rob Hall and I met with some people from India who have come to the Bay Area. They're believers with a passion to reach other Indians for the gospel. Thousands live here in the Bay Area, working as physicians, engineers and software designers. Many live right here in this neighborhood in Foster City. But there aren't enough of them worshipping with us. Why is that? How will we reach them? How will we get them to join this chorus of praise to the Lamb? When we see every tongue and every nation as part of this worship scene in heaven, we ought to ask that question.

#### **Conclusion**

Jesus is worthy of worship because through his death he's overcome all that stands against the plan and purposes of God. He has overcome sin, death and the devil. He has overcome not through strength but weakness. He has overcome for every tribe and tongue and nation. Will you stop weeping and start worshipping? The lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, the lamb who was slain, is worthy of our worship! He has overcome and he and he alone can open the scroll!