

# **REVELATION**

Part 11: “Behold the Lamb”

Revelation 5:1–14

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## **Summary**

Join us as we explore Revelation 5, where the unveiling of the Lamb reveals true power, the meaning of history, and the only one worthy of worship. Discover how Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, challenges our perceptions of strength and offers us hope and humility in a broken world.

## **Scripture Reading**

*“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 mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” 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.” 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 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. 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 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, 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!” 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!” And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped” (Revelation 5:1–14, ESV).*

## **Introduction**

In Revelation 5, we are witnessing the continuation of a vision of the Apostle John that began in the previous chapter. John is experiencing an immersive revelation of God in the very throne room of heaven. He beholds God on his throne, and he sees angels and elders and representations of all of creation worshipping their Creator.

This is not just a future moment of a single event. This is an *eternal* moment beyond the confines of created space and time. John witnesses an overwhelming display of the glorious sovereignty of God on his throne as he is bending creation and time to his glory and our good.

But there is a problem that must be addressed. Sin has entered the world and fractured God's good creation. Sin has introduced the power of death into the cosmos.

Yet, God on his throne is good and just and wise. He is the Holy One who will not endure the existence of evil. The book of Revelation will show how he will indeed bring forth justice, right all wrongs, and make all things new. He has a plan.

But how could we ever know that plan? How could created beings like us ever dream to know the mind of our Creator?

However, John sees in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a *scroll*. The scroll is God's self-revelation. It is the plan of redemption for all history and time. However, the scroll is not open. It is sealed [show [1Sealed Scroll](#)].

Now, in the ancient world, when a king would issue a major decree, that decree would be written on a scroll. However, to make sure that the scroll was authenticated as the unaltered words of the king, that scroll would be closed with a wax seal that would then be pressed with a special symbol on the ring of the king. This meant that only certain people would be allowed to open the scroll.

But the scroll of Revelation 5 is not only sealed [[2The Seven Sealed Scroll](#)]. It is sealed with *seven* seals. The number seven represents wholeness, completion, perfection, and divine authority. Thus, only one who is both perfect and divine would be worthy to open and unseal the scroll.

But who could ever possibly meet these requirements? John writes, "[And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?'](#)" (Rev 5:2).

For a moment, none in heaven or on earth or under the earth can be found worthy, and the apostle John weeps. Unless the seals are broken, the plans of God will be shrouded in mystery.

For to open the scroll and see the truth with unveiled eyes, we must "*Behold the Lamb*" of God. So, for the rest of our time today, I want to show how Revelation 5 teaches us

that 1.) *The Lamb is the Revelation of True Power*, 2.) *The Lamb is the Meaning of History*, and 3.) *The Lamb is the Only One Who is Worthy*.

## **Exposition**

### **1.) The Lamb is the Revelation of True Power**

In the Roman Empire, all the great songs were sung of war and men of war. The ancient world envisioned power as nothing more than the sheer will and capacity of the strong to assert their will upon the weak by any means necessary. In this world, power was violence. Greatness was brutality. And fortune favored the bold.

So, for those, like the Jewish people, who were tired of feeling weak and weary and constantly at the mercy of petty tyrants, they would have longed for a savior to set them free. They would have longed for a messiah to rise from within the tribe of Judah and be as mighty as a lion. They would have longed for the promised descendant of the ancient King David to step forth and make the kingdom of Israel great and glorious again.

That's why it is such good news when John hears that such a deliverer has been found. The Apostle writes, *"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'"* (Rev 5:3-5).

But then there is a surprise. A messiah steps forth, but he is not a military messiah. He will bring forth salvation, but it will not be the political salvation everyone would have expected and longed for.

In fact, this is one of several important instances in the book of Revelation where there is a difference between what John *hears* and what John *sees*. He *hears*, "Behold, the Lion of Judah!" But he does not *see* a lion.

From the midst of the living creatures, which represent creation, and the twenty-four elders, which represent God's people, steps forth *a lamb*.

John describes the scene in verse 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. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne"* (Rev 5:6-7).

Now, at the onset, we should admit that the image portrayed here is strange [**3The Lamb with Seven Horns and Seven Eyes**]. It is an undead zombie lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. It's odd and even grotesque if we were to try and imagine this lamb in strict, literal terms.

But Revelation is not literal—it’s *apocalyptic*. Revelation speaks to us in images and symbols that unveil hidden and spiritual realities. And all these details have symbolic value and meaning. The number seven represents wholeness, completion, and perfection. The horns are an Old Testament image that represents authority and power. The text itself tells us the eyes represent the seven spirits of God. Thus, this lamb is One who is perfect in power and One in whom the fullness of the Spirit of God dwells.

That he comes from the midst of the living creatures means that this Redeemer is not only worthy to rule creation—he has also *joined himself* to creation. It is a prophetic picture of the incarnation of Christ, wherein the One by whom all things were made was made a man.

But the fact that he is a lamb is an odd choice. Throughout history, from the ancient world all the way up until now, kingdoms and nations have chosen to represent themselves as certain types of animals. Almost always, the animal is an alpha predator sitting at the top of the food chain. After all, you would want your national symbol to be something that represented power and might and ferocity.

So, for centuries, the United Kingdom has been represented by a red lion. China is a dragon. Russia is a bear. And the United States is, of course, the eagle.

And what about the kingdom of God? What will be the kingdom of God’s symbol of true power? It is, shockingly, *the lamb*.

But a lamb is not a symbol of intimidation or threatening supremacy. It is a symbol of vulnerability, meekness, and humility. In Jewish culture, lambs were used for sacrifices. And, indeed, this lamb stands “*as though it had been slain*.” Yet even though this lamb had been slain, he is not dead. Instead, he has overcome the very power of death.

As odd and surprising as it is, this image of the lamb is *the unveiling of true power*. It is the subversion of all our expectations of true power. Unlike the kingdoms of this world that acquire power through death and destruction, the power of the lamb is the power of resurrection and restoration! It is the power that will make all things new.

This lamb is perhaps the most crucial image in all of Revelation. We must see this lamb first and foremost if we are to understand all that comes next in these words of prophecy. For the lamb is the only one who is worthy to unseal the scroll.

So, when we behold in Revelation all the horror of God’s judgments against sin and death and all the cosmic battles between God’s people and the powers of darkness, all of these mysteries must be seen in the light of the lamb who was slain.

And in a world that is often ruled by dragons and beasts, we must seek to walk in the way of the lamb. In a world driven by bullies and brutality, we must have unveiled eyes to see a totally different type of king than the kings of this world. We must behold the king who conquers *not* by shedding the blood *of* his enemies but by *giving* his own blood *for* his enemies so that they might be ransomed and redeemed.

Such a king is worthy of more than our loyalty. He is worthy of our worship. John writes, “*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. 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’*” (Rev 5:8–10).

## **2.) The Lamb is the Meaning of History**

Humans are curious by nature. Whenever there is a mystery before us, we want to solve it. So, we want to know the answer to questions like: why do we exist? Do our lives matter? Does history matter? Or is all of this existence really just “*...a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing?*”

Deep in our bones, we need life to mean something. We are constantly trying to make sense of the chaos of the world around us, and the primary way we do this is through the stories we tell ourselves. And the world is constantly telling us stories that it would have us believe.

There is *the story of progress*, which tells us that through science, enlightenment, and technology, we are destined to make the world better and better.

There is *the story of the golden age*, which tells us that the world is getting worse and worse, and things would all be better if we could go back to how it was in the good old days.

There is *the story of identity*, which tells us that the purpose to life is to go and discover our true selves and be our true selves and there is nothing we could ever do that is wrong so long as we are true to ourselves.

Yet, all the stories of the world are ultimately exposed as shallow and hollow when confronted by true suffering and sorrow. When a loved one unexpectedly dies, when the innocent suffer, when we acutely feel the brokenness of this sin-fractured creation—we need to know if there is true meaning to all of this.

*And the lamb that was slain is God’s answer to that question.*

The cross of Jesus Christ means that God can bring forth light out of our darkness. He can breathe the power of resurrection into our death. He can bring beauty from our brokenness.

God is not the author of sin or our sorrows. But if he can take the evil of the cross and turn it into the source of our redemption, then he is sovereign enough to bend all our sorrow toward redemption and glory.

Because of the victory of the lamb, there is a day coming when death will die, and sorrow will be no more. There is a day coming when all tears will be wiped away. And to tell you the truth, I don't even know how that is even possible. I just know that the One who made this promise is faithful and true. For the Lion of Judah has conquered.

Our job is to see this is the true story of the world and the true meaning of history. And even more, we are called to see ourselves in this story.

We can see ourselves in this story when we pray and read our Bibles. We press this story in our hearts when we gather in worship to receive the word and sacrament.

But remember, we must not be satisfied with being mere recipients of grace. No, we are called to be instruments through which grace flows into our broken world. We are not called to be mere containers of the love of God. We are called to be conduits through which the love of God flows into those around us. As our passage reminds us, we were ransomed that we might be a kingdom and priests for our God.

So, when we choose the way of humility instead of pride, when we seek to serve rather than seek significance, we are participating in the very life of Christ. Thus, it is no small thing to give up an hour on a Sunday to teach a preschooler the Bible. It is no small thing to spend time cleaning a sanctuary or welcome guests to our church. It is no small thing to go to a refugee family's apartment and practice conversational English.

It is during such moments that we find the meaning of our existence. It is when we lay down our lives that we find it (cf. Matt 10:39). It is when we model our lives after the lamb that we find true purpose.

I'm reminded of an old Puritan prayer named "The Valley of Vision" that prays the following:

*"Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly,  
Thou has brought me to the valley of vision,  
where I live in the depths but see thee in the heights;  
hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold  
Thy glory.  
Let me learn by paradox  
that the way down is the way up,  
that to be low is to be high,  
that the broken heart is the healed heart,  
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,  
that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,  
that to have nothing is to possess all,  
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,*

*that to give is to receive,  
that the valley is the place of vision.*<sup>1</sup>

### **3.) The Lamb is the Only One who is Worthy**

The dramatic scene of Revelation 5 is a visual echo of the words of the Prophet John the Baptist, who once cried out in the wilderness, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!

It is a chapter crafted to help us see the only One who is worthy to open the scroll, stand at the right hand of the Father, and receive the worship of all creation!

John writes, *“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, 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!’ 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!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped”* (Rev 5:11–14).

Whenever I read this passage, I think of famous piece of art named The Ghent Altarpiece [show [4The Ghent Altarpiece](#)]. It is the masterpiece of a Flemish artist named Jan Van Eyck. Standing at a massive eleven feet high, Van Eyck designed the altarpiece and painted for a private chapel in a Belgian town named Ghent.

It is one of the first oil paintings in the world, and it is astonishing in its detail and texture. Even more astonishing is the fact that it was painted in 1432, which makes it older than the invention of the printing press or Columbus’s journey to the New World.

And perhaps the most famous single image of the Ghent altarpiece is the central lower panel, which is commonly known as *“The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb”* [[5Adoration of the Mystic Lamb](#)].

This panel is a processional scene, illuminated by a dove wreathed in light at the top of the panel, which represents the Holy Spirit. Here, groups of Apostles and Prophets, priests and saints, angels and martyrs from all of time, march through the restored Eden of New Creation. They are all drawn toward the center, where angels hold emblems of Christ’s cross and suffering. And in the very center, there is a lamb standing on an altar [[6Detail of the Lamb](#)].

And the lamb is standing as one who was slain, as blood pours from his body into a chalice. But though he was slain, he is not defeated. Instead, the lamb shines in glory and stands in victory. For the lamb alone is worthy!

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<sup>1</sup> *The Valley of Vision*, Banner of Truth, xxiv.

The that blood is poured into a chalice is not taken from the lamb. It is given by the lamb for the life and nourishment of his people.

So, too, every time we come before the Lord's Table—every time we remember the cross and receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, every time we remember the weight of our sin and the worth of our Savior, every time we center our lives around the One who alone is worthy—we are participating in this moment! We are united with the people of God throughout space and time! We are in the very presence of the lamb who was slain!

Can you see what the artist Jan Van Eyck is inviting us to see? Can you see what John the Apostle is inviting us to imagine?

I admit these images are strange and mystical, but the book of Revelation is strange and mystical. It beckons us to see something that the world cannot see outside of Christ. It beckons us to see how radically different, better, and worthy Jesus is than any of the kings of this world.

### **Conclusion**

For in a world where emperors of men made themselves into gods, Jesus is the God who was made a man. In a world where emperors pretended to be divine, Jesus chose to take upon himself the form of a servant and submit to death on a cross.

Yet, while emperors and kings and presidents will conquer and rule through the power of violence, they are all powerless to overcome the power of the grave.

But the same isn't true for Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

For the Spirit of God has raised him from the dead, never to die again. Christ has now been seated at the right hand of God above all rulers and authorities and powers and dominion. And he has been given the name that is above every name.

What happens when we truly believe this? What would change if we believe that the lamb who was slain is truly at the center of everything?

I believe two virtues would be birth in our hearts if we can truly see the lamb of God, and they are hope and humility. When we see the lamb, we can have a hope that is not circumstantial, a hope that cannot be conquered, a hope that can endure whatever suffering and sorrow the world hurls our way.

And when we see the lamb, we can have a humility that defeats all pride and dispels all illusions of self-glory for a glory that is far greater.

So, Redeemer Christian Church, may we have unveiled eyes that see Jesus. May we behold the Lion of Judah. May we see the lamb who was slain but who has overcome death!



As the Apostle Paul once wrote, *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil 2:5–11).

AMEN.

## **Discussion Starters for Gospel Community**

1. Take some time to read the entirety of Revelation 5 out loud.
2. How does the imagery of the Lamb in Revelation 5 challenge our cultural understanding of power and strength?
3. How can embracing the humility and sacrificial nature of the Lamb impact our daily lives and interactions with others?
4. Consider the call to worship and honor the Lamb who was slain. In what ways can we cultivate a lifestyle of worship that acknowledges Jesus Christ as the center of our lives and the source of our salvation?