

Worthy is the Lamb

Revelation 5:1-14

Members of the Church through faith in Jesus Christ, it is your privilege to sing with the saints in heaven:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

Jesus is worthy of being given power.
Jesus is worthy of being given wealth.
Jesus is worthy of being given wisdom and might.
Jesus is worthy of being given honor and glory.
And Jesus is worthy of being given blessing.

Why does Jesus need to receive these?
Does He not already possess them as God?
He most certainly does.
But He must be given them as your Redeemer, or they will not do you any good.
It is as your Redeemer that He is given each of these. And as your Redeemer, He is now qualified to give each of them to you.

Power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor and glory and blessing will indeed flow to you because Jesus is Worthy, and He is the Lamb who was slain.

Read Revelation 5:1-14.

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.

The Triune God is sitting on the throne. In His hand is a scroll, full of writing on both sides. The scroll is locked with 7 seals.

To break these seals and to read the contents of the scroll will bring to pass what is written on it. But if the seals cannot be broken and scroll not read, then the words on the scroll will not come to pass.

The fact that the scroll has 7 seals may mean only that the scroll is "perfectly sealed", seven being a number of perfection.

But I believe that there being 7 seals also helps us to connect the contents of the Scroll with the destiny of the Church.

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The seven churches represent the entirety of the God's people throughout the history of the world.

The final destiny of these seven churches depends upon the One who is worthy to break the seals.

The scroll is in the hand of the Triune God. But He is looking for someone, a human being, who is worthy, to take the scroll, open it, and read its contents.

In chapter 1, Jesus held the Church in His right hand.

Revelation 1:16 ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars,

Revelation 1:20 ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

But we were not told how He came to hold the Church in His right hand.

Here in chapter 5, we learn how Jesus has obtained the right to Redeem His people.

2 And
 I saw
 a strong 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.

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The angel sends forth a call to any and all: Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? He is asking, "Who is worthy to redeem the Church?" "Who is worthy to conquer all evil?"

In Revelation 5, time is compressed. Just as quickly as the Angel gives his call, it is obvious that there was no one who is qualified to open the scroll.

This realization leads John to begin weeping.

John understands that unless someone can open the scroll the kingdom of God will never come into being. Evil will just keep on reigning over this world in which we live. The Church will not be redeemed.

But more personally, there would be no forgiveness for your sin. There would be no cleansing of your heart. There would be no power to overcome the evil within you. The hopelessness and doom of this life would remain.

There would be no "happily ever after." (Pause)

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."

It is significant that it is one who has been redeemed and who is enjoying the bliss of heaven who speaks now to John.

There is One who is worthy. There is One who has conquered.

He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Root of David.

These titles point back to OT prophecy.

In Genesis 49, Jacob pronounces a blessing upon the Tribe of Judah.

From this tribe would come a ruler, a lion, and to him will be the obedience of the peoples.

Later on, King David, who was of the Tribe of Judah, would become a king after God's own heart. And to David, God promises the same eternal kingdom.

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The Davidic line had some good kings, but many terrible kings, and it eventually comes to an end with the Exile.

But the failure of these human kings did not abolish God's promise to David. Isaiah makes sure that God's people would continue to look for one to come from the line of David.

Isaiah 11:1-2 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse (David's father), and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

Isaiah 11:10 ¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples (a banner under which they would be redeemed) - of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

The One who is worthy is the Promised Messiah of the OT. He is the One who has conquered where previous leaders have failed.

But how has He conquered?
In what way has He conquered?
What is it that makes Him worthy?

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.

Since John has been told that it is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who has conquered, he must have been expecting to see a powerful lion. Instead, John sees a Lamb, a lamb looking as if he had been slain.

John is not casting doubt as to whether the Lamb had been slain. He is making plain that the Lamb clearly had the marks of having been slain, but that He was now also clearly alive.

The image of the Lamb comes from the Passover Lamb. A Lamb was sacrificed, and its blood was smeared on the doorposts of a house. Because of this blood the Angel of

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Death passed over the house and did not slay the firstborn son of the house. This Passover Lamb points to Jesus Christ as the True Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The location of this Lamb is important. He is between the throne and the four living creatures. This means that He is before the face of God, as close as you can get. He is also “in the midst” of the elders, meaning that He is united to the Church. He is the Mediator between God and men.

We are told that this Lamb has 7 horns. A horn represents power. In this case, He has 7 horns because He has power to control the destiny of the whole Church. He has seven eyes to show His knowledge of, and connection with, the entire Church who is redeemed from throughout the entire earth.

7 And
 he went
 and
 took the scroll
 from the right hand
 of him who was seated on the throne.

By taking the scroll, Jesus proves that He now is worthy...
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!

And now possessing these, as our Redeemer, He has the authority to give them to His people. Look at what happens now that Jesus has the scroll in his possession.

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.

What is response of the redeemed Church to the Lamb being worthy to take the scroll? They fall down before the Lamb, to give to Him their allegiance and their worship. The harp represents many musical instruments, but is particularly appropriate because king David played a harp.

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Psalm 144:9-10 ⁹ I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you, ¹⁰ who gives victory to kings, who rescues David his servant from the cruel sword.

And God's people come into the presence of the LORD through their prayers.

The golden bowls of incense evoke images of the temple. A worshipper would want to make a request to the LORD. He would bring an animal for sacrifice. The priest would slay the animal and then burn it on the altar. Some of the ashes of that sacrifice would be put into a bowl to be carried by the priest into the Holy place, where it would be placed upon the altar of incense that was directly in front of the curtain separating the Holy place from the Most Holy Place where the throne of God was situated over the ark of the covenant.

God would smell the pleasing aroma of these prayers and give a favorable answer to the request of the worshipper.

Christians pray for many things, but in the context of Revelation, the prayers of the saints are asking for God to judge those who had persecuted the Church. And later on, in response to the prayers of His people Jesus will use bowls when pouring out His wrath out upon the earth.

In fact, the primary way that Christians reign in our present situation is through our prayers. God carries out His holy will to redeem His people and give them the Kingdom through the prayers of His saints.

Dr. Kelly writes:

“The saints are reigning with Christ already through prayer. The saints are making a difference in how history unfolds by their prayers. God says that their prayers are shaping the future and in this sense they are already reigning with Christ.” Kelly 110.

The third response to Jesus taking the scroll is for God's people to sing to Him a new song.

⁹ And
they sang a new song,

New songs are for times of joy and praise in response to a marvelous work of God. They are written to celebrate God's victory for His people!

Psalm 149:1 Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!

This song is not sung so much for Jesus' divine nature, or His work at creation. It is sung for His work of dying on the cross and for what that work accomplished. We sing of what Jesus has done to become worthy to give us a right to His eternal kingdom.

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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,

By Jesus' willing sacrifice of Himself on the cross, His blood "ransomed people for God".

What does this word "ransom" (avgora,zw) mean?

In our modern day, we use the word when someone is held hostage. It is the price demanded by the captors to set the hostage free.

In the biblical times, it was a more common term used in the marketplace for the cost of goods. It was the purchase price of a commodity. To buy. And since people were bought and sold as slaves in the marketplace, it was also the price one would pay for a slave.

Jesus is worthy because He purchased people with His blood. The price set to buy these people was His blood.

By His blood is shorthand for "His life". The cost for redemption was a life for a life. In order to buy a person from their condemnation to death, another person would have to pay the price of being condemned to death.

This assumes that the just sentence of God over every man, woman, and child was death. If all men were not condemned to death, then the cost for redemption would not have been the death of Christ.

It is important to know to whom the price was paid. It is tempting to think that the price was paid to Satan because we were held captive in his "domain of darkness."

Colossians 1:13 ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

But Satan is no more than the warden of the prison. The ransom price is not paid to him.

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The ransom price is paid to God Himself. God is the One who determined the price when He declared that the wages of sin would be death. It is the justice of God's character that will not allow Him to accept any lesser payment.

He set the price as a life for a life, and so the price will remain. Theologians call this "substitutionary atonement". In order to purchase a person from the clutches of eternal death, another person must endure the pains of eternal death.

There are no exceptions to this rule. If a person is to be redeemed, he must be bought. And the purchase price is death. And the life given to purchase a person had to be a sinless life. If the payment life was itself sinful, then this person would have to die for his own sin.

Picture a long line of people waiting for their execution. One person who is first in line is pleading for someone to help him. Another person is further back in the line. For whatever reason he decides to take the place of the man who is first in line. What has he gained this man? Nothing but a little bit of time. He is still in line for execution.

What both men need is for someone who is not in the line to exchange places with him. This is what Jesus has done. He has purchased your freedom from death by His own death on the cross.

It is also critical to see that you have not been purchased by Jesus for the purpose of gaining your freedom from God. You have been purchased for God.

The person who has been purchased now belongs to God. It has been said that God owns the redeemed person twice. He owns you because He created you. But He also owns you because He bought you.

Our God is the most benevolent of owners. He is not a harsh taskmaster. But He is Lord. He knows that our greatest happiness will be found in learning submission to His will. He knows that we run best when we are drafting on His lead. There is a great deal of variety and individuality among His people. But every redeemed person finds their purpose in being conformed to His image.

One of the lies of our present culture is that people must first and foremost "be true to themselves" if they are ever going to be happy. And they are the ones who determine what version of themselves they desire. If God has a different idea, then God is the One who is being cruel.

The truth is that God has made each of us unique. But He has also called each of us to Himself. He is the One who decides who and what we are to be. He is the One who made us in the first place. And He is the One who redeemed us to return us to the image of His One and Only Son.

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Striving to bring ourselves into conformity to the One who bought us is the purpose of life. Not one of us has arrived. We all resist God in many ways. We are like little children demanding our own way against a parent who knows much better than we what is best.

But we keep striving to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus had taken hold of us.

We have not been bought to a life of independence from God. We have been bought for God.

Who is it that Jesus has purchased with his life?

He has purchased people...

from every tribe
and language
and people
and nation,

Jesus has purchased “people”. He has not only purchased one person. He has purchased many persons. How is He able to do this?

Was the payment price not a life for a life? How is it possible that one life can purchase many people?

There are two ways to answer this question. The first is to say that while Jesus was one man, He was also one man united to the Divine Nature.

Only as a man could Jesus die. But because His humanity is united to Deity, His death possessed infinite value.

This also helps explain how Jesus only needed to bear the wrath of God for a short while when the penalty place upon us was an eternal death. At most, we can say that Jesus endured “death” for parts of three days. I even believe Jesus satisfied the justice of God while He was on the cross. When He said, “It is finished”, He was declaring that the price had been fully paid.

It was in union with the divine nature that the human death of Jesus had eternal and infinite worth.

Understanding this, it is entirely possible that Jesus’ death might have redeemed all men. Who could limit the value of His sacrifice?

This has led some to believe in something called Universalism – the belief that in the end all men will be saved. This might sound good, but there are too many passages that speak of many people being judged to an eternal damnation for their rejection of Jesus Christ. And our passage today does not say that He has purchased all people. It says that He has purchased people from every tribe, language, people and nation.

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In other words, some people from every people and nation.

This has led others to conclude that while the death of Christ has made salvation possible for all people, it is only granted to those who believe. This view is much better than Universalism because it calls people to personal repentance and faith. And it is absolutely true that only those who repent of their rebellion to God and who cast themselves upon the mercy of God in Christ will be saved.

But this view also falls short of what the text says.

This leads us to the second view of how Jesus could die for many. He could die for many because he functions as the representative head of many.

The text does not say that by Jesus' blood He has purchased all people, but only some of those people would be redeemed. It says that by His blood He purchased people, ransomed people.

If Jesus purchased all people but only some would choose to believe, then there would be many people that Jesus bought but never received. He bought them, but He never gets them.

Think for a moment how angry you become if you pay for something that you never get. How is it right that when it comes to the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we are willing to think that God should be fine with purchasing people but not getting the people He purchased.

The best view is that although Jesus' death was sufficient to redeem all people, it was intended to save those whom God had chosen before the foundation of the world.

When Jesus died on the cross, He had specific people in mind. If you are repenting of your sin and trusting in Jesus Christ, then you can know that when Jesus died on the cross, He was purchasing you.

And He was not only purchasing you. He was purchasing every person whom the Father had given to Him before the world began.

John 6:37 ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

The Father in eternity past determined to give a people to His Beloved Son. And the Son willingly accepted the task of accomplishing the redemption of this same people. And the Spirit willingly works in response to the work of the Son to apply the redemption to the elect.

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He does this by convicting us of the evil of our rebellion.

He does this by awakening in us a desire to be reconciled to God.

He does this by giving us a new heart that inwardly desires God and His holiness.

He does this by sweetly drawing us to believe in Jesus Christ.

And He does this by aiding us throughout our lives to continue believing in Christ and repenting of sin.

The result of all this is that all for whom Jesus died will enjoy the perfection of life with Him in eternal glory as members of His beloved bride.

On the cross, Jesus purchased a bride. His bride will be complete. She will not be missing any limbs. All those whom He purchased will be with Him eternally.

So while Jesus commands us to proclaim the Gospel to all men, we believe that only those who are chosen by God will be given the grace necessary to believe.

This view does justice to the text: Jesus by His blood, purchased people for God.

This makes Jesus' act of dying the means by which He conquers sin and death.

This makes this act of weakness more powerful than Adam's act of disobedience that plunged the whole world into chaos. By this one act of righteousness, Jesus conquers evil while guaranteeing our fullness of joy.

And it most effectively explains why we sing.

As believers, we do not sing of the wonder of our faith. We do not praise ourselves or one another because we were somehow able to believe when others refused to believe.

We praise Jesus Christ! Because by His blood He purchased us.

And by His power and wisdom, Jesus makes us into a kingdom.

10 and
 you have made them
 a kingdom
 and
 priests to our God,
 and
 they shall reign on the earth."

As citizens in His Kingdom, we are made to "reign on the earth."

We are redeemed to worship God. We see this in the singing that John is witnessing.

But we are not only redeemed to sing.

We are redeemed to rule.

Adam and Eve were created to rule over the created world in God's kingdom.

God's original purpose for man would now be fulfilled through the work of Jesus Christ.

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We are made priests in the sense that we can enter into the presence of God. Jesus is the Great High Priest, of course. But because of Him, we are continually free to enjoy the Holy presence of our God without fear of His wrath.

And because Jesus sits on the throne of His eternal kingdom, we sit beside Him as co-kings and queens.

It is not enough that we are given access to heaven. We were purchased by Jesus to rule on the earth. In some sense this rule is already happening.

Jesus is reigning as He works in this world to redeem all his elect.

Jesus is reigning through the prayers of His people, as He works all things for their good.

Jesus is reigning as He, by His Spirit, enables Christians to say no to sin and yes to righteousness.

Any growth in personal holiness that occurs is the result of Christ's reign in you.

But Christ's present reign is incomplete in this life. It will not be fully realized until Christ returns to the earth, and all the saints from every age are raised up from the grave and those who are alive on the earth are transformed in the twinkling of an eye, and the Final Judgment of all men occurs.

Then, and only then, will the reign of Christ and our reign as his bride, come in its fullness on the earth. This is our hope.

This is what the blood of Christ has guaranteed.

It is not a possibility. It is a certainty.

And to think that Christ has accomplished our redemption and final reign with Him on the earth entirely through His one act of redemption on the cross, is mind boggling.

Was there ever an act so weak that accomplished so much?

"God achieved his triumph and delivered his people not through the fireworks of military might, but through the weakness of crucifixion." Poythress, "The Returning King", 109.

Even in the midst of a life of struggle, you have reason for Joy!

Even though you are experiencing a constant war in this life, you are joined together with the saints in glory who are singing "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain."

Even when you feel yourself to be most unworthy, you have a right to sing of the worthiness of the Lamb, because by His most precious blood, He has purchased you.

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Our only hope is that this glory does not depend upon our worthiness. It depends entirely upon the worthiness of one man – Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

WE are not worthy! Jesus is worthy!!!

“Absolutely nothing we have done in our life that is wrong, unworthy, nasty, unclean or impure disqualifies us to apply the blood of the Lamb. You are invited to sing the song that they sing.” Kelly 110.

Angels and animals join their voices to the Church. Everything in the New Heavens and New Earth will be centered around Jesus Christ. We will all be sharing in His brilliant glory. But it is to Him alone that we will give our praise.

The Sands of Time Are Sinking

4 The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of grace;
not at the crown He giveth, but on His piercé hands;
the Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land.

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

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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.