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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“KING OF KINGS, PRIEST OF PRIESTS”**

**Revelation 5:9-14**

What is your reason for being? What is the point of your existence? Why are you here?

Coming on top of “*What’s for dinner?*” and “*Which bill do I pay first?*” the question of purpose can seem overwhelming and unimportant, a topic for ivory tower philosophers and idealistic preachers. Yet purpose is not beside the point; purpose *is* the point.

Life is like a ship. If we avoid the question of purpose, we will be {Eph 4:14} “**tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind.**”

If we address the question but settle on a false answer, we will pull into port only to find that we have landed in hostile territory.

However, if we discover the right answer and navigate accordingly, we will sail to the right destination. No struggle, no loss, no victory will be pointless or wasted.

☐ Please turn to Revelation 5:9-14. This hymn points directly to the purpose of those who are in Christ. We are covering a lot of ground, so please pay close attention.

■ Verse 9 ~ “**And they sang a new song.**”

In Scripture “**a new song**” is sung to celebrate a new act of divine deliverance or blessing. This song is sung for in Christ God has accomplished mighty new deeds of salvation.

■ Verse 9 ~ “**You**” – they are singing to Jesus, who is depicted in verse 6 as a “**Lamb**” that looks “**as if it had**

**been slain**” – “**You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.**”

① Unlike most scrolls, this one has “**writing on both sides**” (Revelation 5:1) – just like the {Ex 32:15} stone tablets of the Ten Commandments!

② It has been sealed with wax or clay. This will prevent any unauthorized person from opening it.

③ Verse 1 says this scroll has been “**sealed with 7 seals.**” {Biblical Imagery} In the Roman province of Asia, a will is enforceable only if: a) the scroll is sealed by seven witnesses, and b) all seven are present when their seals are broken after the person’s death.

This scroll is Jesus’ last will *and* it has all the authority and significance of divine Law. If we were to read chapters 6-8 we would learn that as each seal is opened, history unfolds and God’s kingdom is consummated.

■ Verse 9 ~ “**You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.**”

*Vere Dignus* is Latin for “**You are worthy.**” The crowds shout this whenever the Roman Emperor arrives in their city. Their words point to the ideal that he is able to govern because of his exceptional ethical virtue. What nonsense! Most emperors ascend and keep their throne via legal technicalities, political maneuvering, effective propaganda, well-placed bribes and brute force. A few years in the pigpen of imperial politics is enough to dirty even the most honorable emperors.

■ But applied to Jesus, *Vere Dignus* is entirely accurate. “**You are worthy,**” say verses 9 and 10...

☼ **“You are worthy” for “you were slain.”**

Rome is beginning to require emperor worship. Any subjects who do not bow to the idol and say *Caesar is Lord* could be beaten, tortured, or executed. The Roman emperor will kill to protect his kingship.

Not Jesus. He *died* for his kingdom and his citizens!

Ironically, this emperor who claims to be a god will himself die. And once dead, he will stay down.

Not Jesus. He was killed, but now He is alive!

Going back to the scroll with the seven seals, the true Son of God is the executor of his own will.

Lord Jesus, you are worthy because you were slain!

☼ And, **“You are worthy” for “with your blood you purchased for God members of every tribe... language and people and nation.”**

Jesus testified, I **“did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give [my] life as a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:42-45). **“Ransom”** is the price that is paid to buy a slave’s freedom. Jesus has released us from bondage at the cost of his own death.

Victory through service, suffering and death is integral to God’s kingdom. Jesus said {Mk 8:34} **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”**

Lord Jesus, you are worthy because with your blood you have purchased citizens for your kingdom!

☼ **“You are worthy” for “you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”**

☼ What is the point of our existence? To be citizens of God’s kingdom.

The kingdom consists of all who acclaim God as King, serve God in thought, word, and deed, obey God, and expand God’s reign by bringing his truth to the deceived, his mercy to the guilty, his reconciliation to the estranged, his wholeness to the broken, his freedom to the captives, and his life to the dying.

As a body, Beverly Covenant is fulfilling this purpose better than before – not perfectly, but with increasing devotion, integrity, and consistency. We represent God’s kingdom with sharper clarity than ever.

Having said that, each of us must examine the state of our citizenship, repent of any disloyalty, and commit to greater faithfulness. Am I allowing God to fulfill God’s purpose for me? Are you?

☼ Why are we here? To be priests for God.

A priest is a go-between, a liaison, a mediator between God and people.

{Biblical Imagery} **“It is a pervasive biblical principle that nature [determines one’s] actions, not vice versa.”** Deeds proceed from character. It follows that priestly ministry flows out of priestly identity.

☆ As for identity, true priests are holy. They are set apart by inward purity and outward obedience to God – not as a consequence of their good works, but of their cooperation with God’s good work in them.

This cooperation hinges on right relationship with God. True priests learn to know God because they interact with him as creature to Creator, sculpture to Sculptor, servant to Master, subject to Sovereign, child to Father.

★ God his holy, so this holiness aspect of identify qualifies a priest for the ministry of representing God to others.

Ephesians 2: 22 explains that because of Jesus' reconciling ministry we are **“being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”** God's Holy Spirit who lives in us is equipping us to represent him to the world.

Another Scripture {2 Co 2:15} puts it like this: **“we are...the pleasing aroma of Christ.”** In a world that reeks of death, we are the fragrance of our risen Lord.

The LORD accomplishes this through us as we reflect his character, speak his words and offer spiritual sacrifices.

Sacrifice was at the heart of OT worship. Five kinds of sacrifices achieved different goals. They could atone for sin or celebrate God's greatness or express thanksgiving or consecrate a worshiper to God or fulfill a vow.

Jesus has rendered pointless all other sacrifices of atonement. Hebrews 7:27 ~ **“He sacrificed for [the people's] sins once for all when he offered himself.”**

Yet large parts of the system had nothing to do with atonement. The cross of Christ does not eliminate our responsibility to offer sacrifices of praise, gratitude, dedication, and obedience; to the contrary, it increases it.

Thus, First Peter 2:5 says we **“are... a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”**

**“Therefore,”** Romans 12:1 exhorts, **“offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”**

And Hebrews 13:15-16 calls us to **“continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise”** and **“to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”**

☆ Back to identity: true priests overflow with *αγαπε* love. They receive it from God, return it to God, and extend it to others.

This is not mainly about *feelings*. It is a commitment to seek the best interest of others, and it is revealed in humility, respect, gentleness, mercy, service and truth.

★ God is love, so this *αγαπε* aspect of identity qualifies a priest for the ministry of representing others before God by interceding for them.

God's Word urges us to make **“petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving...for everyone”** (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:1-2). It instructs to **“confess [our] sins to each other and pray for each other”** (James 5:16). It even commands us to **“save others by snatching them from the fire”** (Jude 23) (in other words, to intervene with and on behalf of brothers and sisters who are in danger of falling away).

If we are in Christ we **“are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession,”** (First Peter 2:9) – and intercession is an essential part of the priestly ministry.

Are we living and serving as priests, full of holiness and love? Am I allowing God to fulfill God's purpose for me? Are you?

Lord Jesus, you are worthy because you are the High King who has made us to be your kingdom, and you are the High Priest who has made us to be priests!

What is our reason for being? Why are we here? Revelation 5:9 reveals our purpose. What a purpose it is!

Lord Jesus, **“You are worthy”! “You were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God members of every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”**