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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“YOU ARE WORTHY”
Revelation 5:1-14

It is God’s intent that we focus first on the “*Who*” of the future, second on the “*what*” of the future and only then on the “*when*” of the future. Our faith, hope and love do not depend on what the future holds and when it will happen; they depend on the One who holds the future.

Thus it is good beyond telling that He who holds the future is neither a worldly power nor blind fate, much less the evil devil, but our {Rev 4:8} **“Holy... Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”** {Rev 4:11} **“Our Lord and God”** is uniquely **“worthy...to receive glory and honor and power, for”** with strength and kindness he created and continually sustains the cosmos. All of this (and more) was shown to us in Revelation chapter 4.

Chapter 5 reiterates that message, and also tackles the question, *what does this mean for us?*

■ Revelation 5:1: **“Then I”** (the apostle John) **“saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne”** (that is, God the Father Almighty) **“a scroll with writing on both sides”** (like the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, which also had writing on both sides) **“and sealed with seven seals”** (a seal signifies that a document is authentic and secure, hence reliable and authoritative; seven is the number of perfection and completeness; so this scroll is utterly, entirely true, inviolable, and complete).

■ **Verses 2-4: “And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break**

the seals and open the scroll?’ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.”

John is overcome with grief and disappointment. Why such a dramatic response?

● In chapters 6 and 8 we discover that this is the scroll of destiny. It reveals some of the “*what*” of the future, a little of the “*when*,” but above all “*the Who*.”

The Almighty holds the scroll in his **“right hand”** because it belongs to him. It belongs to him because he has decreed its contents.

These are not dead words on a static page. Like the rest of the Scriptures they are (Hebrews 4:12) **“living and active.”**

And these words are not only descriptive, they are performative. The LORD declares, (Is. 55:10-11)

**“As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I
sent it.**

Our God is literally holding the future in his hand. As each seal of the scroll is broken a portion of the contents will occur.

However, the Father does not perform this task himself. According to his will, a worthy mediator must bring history to its foreordained consummation.

If one is not found, the scroll will remain unopened. If it remains unopened history will “get stuck” and God’s plan for the universe will be frustrated.

It is not that time will stop and we will all be frozen in place. It is that this present darkness will continue to gather strength unabated. Sin, death and the devil will grind the creation under the heel of their boots forever. There will be no end to sickness, mortality, immorality, injustice, and idolatry. No wonder John weeps and weeps!

Two brief observations.

One, this confirms what we have already said. What matters most is the *“Who”* of the future.

Two, to the extent that Revelation does address the *“what”* of the future, it concentrates on salvation history. This book is uninterested in history as such; it is extremely interested in God’s activity within human history to save us. {Jn 20:31} **“These [miraculous signs] are written that [we] may believe...Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name.”**

Will we have life? If it depended on us the answer would be a resounding “No!” Thank God, we have a worthy mediator!

■ On to verses 5-7: **“Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open**

the scroll and its seven seals.’ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.....He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.”

This Lion of a Lamb is the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, Christ Jesus – but what a lamb! He has **“seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”**

The Risen Lord has a glorified, but still recognizably human, body. This is not a literal depiction but a symbolic description of his attributes.

The horn is an image of might. The Lamb has seven, indicating perfect power. Christ is omnipotent.

The eye is a biblical image of awareness. The Lamb has seven, indicating perfect insight and wisdom. Christ is omniscient.

John equates his **“seven eyes”** with **“the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”** There is only one Holy Spirit so this, too, is figurative. In this case the number seven indicates that he is everywhere at once, perfect in presence. Christ is omnipresent.

As impressive as all this is, it is not sufficient to substantiate the claim that this Lion of a Lamb is qualified to open the scroll. He is worthy, first and foremost, because he died and rose again.

■ Verses 8-10:

When he had taken [the scroll], the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb.... And they sang a new song:

**“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased
men [and women] for God
from 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.”**

The world-ending events of Revelation have not yet occurred. They could be decades, or centuries, or thousands of years in the future.

Yet our exploration of this text is not an irrelevant indulgence in idle curiosity or speculative theology. What we are doing today gets to the heart of daily life in this time and place. This is what I mean:

A) The Lamb is already the mediator of salvation history. He is guiding history toward its goal: God’s final victory over sin, evil and death.

B) Our redemption is part of this plan. If we are alive in Christ, then the tiny thread of our personal narratives (past, present, and future) are woven into God’s cosmic narrative.

C) Our **“reign on the earth”** mentioned in verse 10 lies ahead. But the Lion of Judah has already made us **“a kingdom and priests to serve our God.”**

The implications are mind-boggling.

First, “A kingdom and priests” are titles of identity. Our purchase by the Son determines both whose we are (we belong to him), and who we are.

We are (First Peter 2:9) **“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that [we] may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** We are citizens of the kingdom. Better yet we are {2 Co 6:18} **“sons and daughters”** of the King, {Ro 8:17} **“heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”**

The words of First Corinthians 1:26-28 are appropriate here: **“think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things....”**

Second, **“A kingdom and priests”** are also titles of vocation. I am not talking about a 9 to 5 job or even a career. This is our calling, our mission, our life’s work. It is the pursuit that will not let go, once it grabs us.

As a kingdom our vocation is to manifest God's realm in thought, word, and deed, by how we interact with people, the planet, money, material objects, and time.

As priests our vocation is to bless God and mediate his presence to the world by worshiping, alone and together, and by offering prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, lament, petition for ourselves, and intercession for others.

Our identity and vocation necessarily involve obedience and allegiance to the Lion of Judah and his Father. We are **"a kingdom"** only in relationship to the King. We are **"priests"** only in service to our God. But that is not the beating heart of life in Christ.

☑ All of this remains barren assent and futile effort apart from a blazing love for God that encompasses our entire being. To quote singer Jason Gray,

**...it's gotta be
More like falling in love
Than something to believe in
More like losing my heart
Than giving my allegiance**

**Caught up, called out
Come take a look at me now
It's like I'm falling, oh
It's like I'm falling in love....**

**Love, love, love
Deeper and deeper, it was
Love that made me a believer**

**In more than a name
A faith, a creed
Falling in love with Jesus brought
The change in me**

When we start to love the Lord with our heart, soul, mind and strength we begin to live into our true identity and vocation. Or rather, God does that great work within us.

And as he does the words of the heavenly hymns in verses 12-13 become real here and now in our daily lives:

**"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"**

**"To him who sits on the throne and to
the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
forever and ever!"**

Our faith, hope and love depend not on what the future holds and when it will happen, but on the One who holds the future. Let us give our attention above all to the "Who" of the future. He is worthy!