

Sermon – 25/03/2007 am

Worthy is the Lamb

Study Text: Revelation 5:8-14

John *wept much because no one was found worthy to open the scroll* that was in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne in heaven (5:4). Then he looked and saw *a Lamb as though it had been slain* (5:6). The Lamb came and took the scroll from the hand of him who sat on the throne. When he did so, the whole host of heaven erupted in spontaneous praise and worship.

Before we look at this worship, and the truth of the Trinity revealed in this passage, we will first ask the question ‘why was the Lion of the tribe of Judah worthy to open the scroll?’

Worthy

Initially no one in all the universe was found to open the scroll. No human being who has ever lived or ever will live on any part of this planet or in the universe was found worthy to open the scroll. Why? Because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. No sinner can even approach the throne of God. Jesus is the only man to have ever lived and not sinned.

Does being without sin make Jesus worthy to open the scroll? Well not directly. Does being the Son of God make him worthy to open the scroll? Well not directly. Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah; he rules with a rod of iron over all men and even the demons. Does this make him worthy? Well not directly. What then is it about Jesus that makes him worthy?

See what the elders sang. *You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because...because you were slain and have redeemed to God by your blood from every tribe, tongue, people and nation* (5:9). Jesus is worthy because he was slain, because he gave himself as a sacrifice for the sin. By his blood he purchased people for God, the elect from all the nations.

The Cross is what made Jesus worthy to open the scroll. At the Cross he defeated him who had the power of death, the devil (Hebrews 2:14), at the Cross he cast out Satan (John 12:31). At the Cross he won the victory, the victory that stands behind all the judgments revealed in the visions of this book.

Jesus has prevailed/triumphed we read in 5:5. He has prevailed by his blood. He has conquered death that entered the world when Adam and Eve sinned against God. The prophets of old told of such a victory. Isaiah spoke of the suffering servant, and of him who was led like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7). The word for ‘slaughter’ and that for ‘slain’ come from the same root.

By his blood Jesus purchased/bought people for God (5:9). In its intensified form, found in Galatians 3:13, 4:5, this word means redeemed/ransomed. This word was used with regard to slaves. By payment of a certain amount of money a slave could be set free. A slave rarely had the capacity to free himself, but kind person may come along, pay the price on his head, and set him free.

This is just what Jesus has done for you who believe. In love he gave his own blood, his own life, to set you free from bondage to death. He bought your freedom; he bought you with his own blood. He gave his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45), a ransom for you.

Set free from bondage – for what purpose you might ask? What does a slave do when he is set free? He will always be indebted to the one who set him free, the one who paid his ransom. Are you thankful to the one who set you free, free from the bondage to sin and to death?

But there is more than this. Great blessings and great honour are spoken of here in this passage with regard to those who are redeemed. The Lamb has *made them to be a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth* (5:10). Not just saved but saved unto good works, and saved to reign with Christ.

To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us to be kings and priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever (1:6-7). So wrote John in the introduction of his letter to the churches. He heard the elders around the throne in heaven singing the same wonderful truth.

We have been made priests by Jesus – we do not need any other earthly priest. *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood* (1 Peter 2:9). We have been made rulers by Jesus. We are a royal people, joint heirs with Christ. We have been raised up *to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 2:6).

Imagine how the poor Christians in Asia must have read these words. Roman kings and Jewish priests were persecuting them unto death. The picture in heaven is totally different. Jesus has made us kings and priests. How well do you see your life from this heavenly perspective? Do you realise who you are in Christ?

Worship

Our passage begins with four living creatures (not beasts! AV) and twenty four elders (not angels, for angels join them in 5:11) falling down to worship the Lamb on the throne. They symbolise creation, and the redeemed human community (the church) respectively. John previously saw them worshipping the One who sits on the throne, who we understand to be Almighty God (4:10).

These worshippers each had a *golden saucer full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints* (5:8). Worship in the temple involved the priest carrying a saucer of burning incense into the holy place. The altar of incense stood before the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place (Hebrews 9:3). It was by this altar that the angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias announcing that his prayer had been heard (Luke 1:11-13)

There is no reference to the burning of incense in the New Testament church, but clearly this symbolism was understood by the Christians. The symbol is found again in Revelation 8:4. The prayers are those of the saints, prayers which come up as a sweet smelling aroma to the One on the throne. Note that Dispensationalists who hold that the church was raptured in 4:1 have to say that ‘saints’ here means converted Jews.

The worshippers had harps, which presumably they played as they sang. These musical instruments are familiar from the Old Testament. David played a harp, and refers to them in the Psalms (Psalm 138:5, 147:7). They sang a new song or a special song, praising the Lamb, the blessed Redeemer, who was worthy to open the scroll.

A great multitude of angels join the living creatures and the elders in worshipping the Lamb (5:12). Then every creature in the universe joins in worshipping the Lamb and the Creator upon the throne in heaven (5:13). The four living creatures shout a triumphant ‘Amen!’ affirming the truth of all that was being sung, but the worship goes on.

One

Looking at the words being sung we note some parallels. The first two songs in chapter 4 were sung to the Creator God.

You are worthy O Lord,

To receive glory and honour and power (4:11).

The next two songs are sung to the Lamb.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,

*To receive **power** and riches and wisdom,
and strength and **honour** and **glory** and blessing! (5:12)*

These seven attributes leave nothing wanting in praise of the Lamb. All that belongs to God the Father also belongs to the Lamb because of his great work of redemption.

The final song as we noted is sung in praise to the God **and** the Lamb, to the Creator **and** the Redeemer. *Blessing and honour and glory and power (5:13)* are repeated in praise of both Father and Son, the first and second person of the glorious Trinity.

John as a Jew was a strict monotheist. Each day he would have declared the *Shema*: ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one!’ (Deuteronomy 6:4). Yet here he sees the Father and the Son being worshipped in heaven. John does not stop to explain but simply reports what he saw; he reports what is consistent with the glorious doctrine of the Trinity as we know it – one God existing in three persons, equal in power and glory.

Worship is a key theme of the book of Revelation. John is actually rebuked for worshipping an angel later in the book. He is told worship God (19:10, 22:9), worship only God. The Christians in Asia were being forced to worship idols and men. This was the test, the trial, which they were facing – who to worship!

It was the same trial faced by people of old. *You shall have no other gods besides me* God declared through Moses. Then they were tempted into making a golden calf and worship it, and later to worship the gods of the Canaanites.

These New Testament Christians were tempted to worship the Emperor who claimed to be ‘lord and god’. It was certainly in their immediate interest to do so! Are we not tempted today to worship men or things other than God? Is it not in our immediate interest? How many people are ‘masters of their own destiny’ worshipping themselves, taking the glory upon themselves that is due to God?

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