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# Heaven's Lamb

## Revelation 5

*Russ Kennedy*

Worship wars...

In heaven, there are no worship wars, only worship...

Once again, let me remind you of our heavenly setting

It is in contrast to what has taken place on earth. The struggles and challenges of the seven churches on earth are the backdrop to the visions of victory in heaven. There is a very real sense in which chapters 4-5 are meant to convey the character of the throne of God rather than some moment in time and history. What is happening to and in the church on earth is not all the story – there is meanwhile an unfolding glorious victory in heaven.

It is connected to what has been revealed in Scripture. The scene here echoes with language and imagery from Ezekiel. Some of what is here will be familiar to us. From Ezekiel's vantage point of standing below the movable throne of God, he saw the mighty crystal dome carried on the double arched wings of the cherubim. Here, we find the throne at rest in heaven. John then sees the dome from above as a sea of glass around which stand the mighty cherubim. Surrounding them are 24 thrones in which sit what are called elders.

So here is the magnificent heavenly throne room as described for us in Revelation 4. So what takes place here takes place there.

<sup>1</sup> After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. <sup>3</sup> And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. <sup>4</sup> Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, <sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

<sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

<sup>11</sup> "Worthy are you, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created."

## The Scene before the Throne

(v.5-7)

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, <sup>4</sup> and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>5</sup> 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."

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

The camera zooms in on a scroll in the hand of God. There is no one qualified to take the scroll

### Praise - His worth and work

In this apocalyptic language we are not to think of this as being literal, but as showing us the Lord Jesus in figurative language. Jesus is the second person of the Godhead now in a glorified body. Through the imagery John sees a message is being communicated. This will be true all over book of Revelation. The Old Testament images will be infused with greater and clearer meaning while retaining the power, majesty and meaning.

Here is also apocalyptic drama bringing us into the New Testament. The Old scroll is sealed. It is full of purposes and promises but cannot be completed on its own. So what follows is not something that happened at some point in time but rather is done to show us through John a soul-lifting, heart stirring truth.

The one who steps forward to take the scroll is the Lion of Judah, the slaughtered Lamb. He is qualified for He is perfect in His power, His character and His work. But the scroll is sealed up only for the one who is qualified in His death and resurrection. He is the Lamb and the Lion, the Redeemer and the Ruler. His seven horns speak of His kingdom authority and show Him to be the final king over all creation. He is all-seeing and all-knowing. He has the seven Spirits of God who roam the earth carrying out the will of the One on the Throne and the One with Scroll.

He can not only take the scroll, but also He can open it. What it contains He will accomplish. All that the Old promised and portended is now ready to unfold in person and work of the Lion-Lamb.

### **Proclaim - His position and power**

This seven-sealed scroll is the testament-will which contains the Kingdom and Covenant promises of God and confers the authority to carry out both His blessings and judgments. John is stunned and then broken that no one is qualified to open the seals and thus bring to fulfillment and finality the purposes of God. Is this it? Is God frustrated? Has the plan failed? Has what happened to Israel now happened to all God's people?

Jesus steps forward to receive the scroll because He is worthy. He is the Redeemer and the Ruler. He has received this authority because it has been granted to Him. Thus, the church on earth in the midst of the struggle gains hope from the surety of this heavenly reality.

### **The Song to the Lion-Lamb**

**(v.8-10)**

This hope is expressed in the praise and worship that follows. This praise arises from the attendants to the throne, the 24 elders and the cherubim.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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,  
<sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth.”

### **Praise - Its Characteristics**

**(v.8-9a)**

THERE IS BOWING – there is a deep sense of humiliation and reverence in the presence of God and at the proclamation and performance of Jesus' worth. I wonder how much is lost to us today in our worship because we never bow, rarely in our spirits and almost never in our bodies.

THERE IS PRAYING – I love the imagery here – the prayers of God's people go up to God like sweet incense. Here before the throne of grace where there is no veil and the Redeemer/Ruler stands, we take our place in prayer as the altar of incense.

THERE IS SINGING – Corporate worship in the Bible always involves praise – singing accompanied by instruments. I wonder what the great voices of cherubim sounds like? The singing here is accompanied by the music of harps and rises up like prayers. Modeled here for us is an engagement that is passionate and powerful.

**Proclaim - Its Content****(v.9-10)**

What is their praise saying? Notice that it is simple and yet rich in content.

**Savoring - Declaring His Worth**

The lyrics of their worship affirm His worth. It believes and acknowledges the heavenly position and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the kingship of Christ is acknowledged.

**Reasons - Describing His Work**

The lyrics of their worship give the reasons for His being worshipped. It is not only His great character, but His mighty doings; not only that who He is, but also all that He has done *for us*. Jesus' finished and accomplished work of redemption is celebrated. It is proclaimed as being completed, universal in its scope and particular in its application. People from every people group have actually been redeemed and are now under His beneficent rule. And they constitute a kingdom of priests who will, in the future, surely rule on the earth.

**The Symphony for the Lion-Lamb****(v.11-12)**

In a swelling symphony all the vast throng raises their voices to the Lord Jesus..

<sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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!" <sup>13</sup> 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!" <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

**Its Multitude****(v.11)**

Joining in with the thunderous acclaim, a majestic multitude of angels lift their mighty voices. John wants us to see a vast, immeasurable multitude of heavenly messengers assembled around the perimeter of the sea of glass. Here are the front row seats of adoring beings joining their voices. John wants us to sense and feel the thundering power and volume of these uplifted voices. I have sat in an auditorium of just 1,400 men singing the praise of God with all their might. What are we to make of the glorious ocean of male voices rising up to the Majestic Presence<sup>6</sup>.

**Its Meaning****(v.12)**

The angels join in to proclaim the worth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we have to think about this a moment. Worth is a measure of value. Worth speaks of a treasure, someone held in high esteem. All these heavenly beings are looking away from their magnificence and acknowledging and treasuring the magnificent worth of Christ. How is it measured? Well, it is measured as giving Him the right to be receive all power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory and blessing. Every category by which greatness can be measured, that praise can be heaped, that worth can be ascribed, is attributed to Jesus.

This crowning worth arises from His cross work. He was slain. This is the endless wonder of heaven. This is the heart of our worship. We ought not just say He is worthy, but measure and magnify that worth with words and lyrics that define and describe giving it scope and significance.

### **Its Universality**

**(v. 13)**

The acclaim now ripples through out the universe. Every creature joins in the praise. No voice in no place is left silent. Every creature in every place in all the cosmos praises Jesus. Notice the language echoing Philippians 2. Listen, my beloved. Jesus will be acknowledged and adored, either in reverential love or in reverential fear – but He will be praised. Every creature – redeemed, elect humanity – elect angels and all that are fallen. Yes, the unrepentant will be punished in the lake of fire forever. But they will bow. No one will go out into eternity unbowed!

### **Its Unanimity**

**(v. 14)**

Everything and everyone is standing on tiptoe to see the Lion/Lamb ascend the throne to His rightful place at the right hand of God. There He is acknowledged as God, co-equal, co-eternal, con-substantial, almighty, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, God of very God, yet slaughtered. The praise and worship, the acclaim of His worth will ring on forever and ever. Over the ringing sound of worship comes a four voiced shout, “Amen”.

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## Reflect and Respond

This is the character of worship as praise and proclaim. It is majestic, thunderous, engaging, passionate and rich in musical elements and full of meaning. It is engaged by all because they know, they see, the inestimable worth and value of Jesus, our Redeemer and our Ruler.

Maybe you are here this evening and you can hardly resonate with this text or this message. It fills you with a sense of foreboding, not a joyous gladness. Come and join all the glorious throng who bow their knee to the high sovereign and to our holy savior. Trust and treasure Him today. Believe in Him, His saving work on the cross and bow to Him, His sovereign worth on the throne.

I call on you, each of you, to examine yourself in the light of this kind of heavenly worship. Are we buried in the strife and struggles and hardships of earthly life? Or even worse, distracted and distanced and dulled by the passing pleasures and tightly gripped stuff of this life? Has the way you have been engaged in worship been informed and shaped by the character of this heavenly worship?

May God have mercy on us and may His grace fall on us and fill us so that our praise and prayers rise like sweet incense from broken but glad hearts to bring pleasure to our great God.

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<sup>6</sup> Always, without exception in the Scriptures, angels are male.