

The Lamb and the Scroll

Rev. 5:1-14

01.24.17

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Less than a month ago, we celebrated the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ together, and as we did we sang some worship songs as a congregation that are only sung during that time a year. And one of the hymns we sang - and that many sing - in celebration of the incarnation of our Lord is a hymn written by John S. Dwight - and put to music by Adolphe Adam - titled O Holy Night.

The first stanza goes like this: ***O Holy night! the stars are brightly shining; It is the night of the dear saviors birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till he appeared and the soul felt it's worth. A thrill of hope - the weary world rejoicing, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn! Fall on your knees! O hear the angels voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born!***

This familiar Christmas hymn is, of course, a hymn of praise for the birth - the incarnation of the God-man Jesus Christ. Everyone recognizes that. But there is half a line in the song that highlights why the birth of the Christ is so praise worthy. Did you notice what it is? Listen to the first two lines again: *O Holy night! the stars are brightly shining; It is the night of the dear saviors birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till he appeared and the soul felt it's worth.* The reason the birth of Christ results in such rejoicing is because until Christ came, the world had lay long under the burden of sin and error - but Jesus's birth meant a new day had dawned - God's new deal was at hand.

This past Sunday, I talked a bit about this very thing in my introduction to our message from Acts 11: 19-26. You may or may not recall, but one of the statements that was made in my introduction was how the book of Acts contains a record of God's marvelous works as touches the gospel and redemption - and this was because until the coming of Christ Jesus the world God made as well as humanity, had lain in darkness and spiritual death for centuries - even for millennia. How did the world, created by a good and benevolent God, get into that situation?

Those who have been christians for just a short while know the answer. The world got into that situation because, through the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, sin entered into the world, Satan came to have great influence over the world, as well as the power over death, and the universe was subjected to futility by God. Do you remember ever hearing this?

Despite this situation - despite this reality - God had promised over these centuries to send a redeemer - a savior - a deliverer - who would deliver humanity from sin and from death. We know this redeemer, deliverer and savior as Jesus Christ, for we look back on His coming, on his life, on his death and on his resurrection. And these great events are in our minds when we speak of the good news of Christ. But, when he came into the world, He had a task to accomplish BEFORE He could serve as our redeemer, deliverer and savior - and as the redeemer, deliverer and savior of the world. Before He could fill the role of redeemer and deliverer, He first had to prove Himself worthy to BE the redeemer and deliverer.

The four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, tell the story of His coming, as well as of His life - and in the story of Jesus's life, we see Him proving Himself worthy to fill the role of God's redeemer and deliverer. For example, Jesus told John the Baptizer that it was needful that he - Jesus - be baptized by John, in order to fulfill all righteousness. After Jesus was baptized - and we have the account of this in Luke 4:1-13 (as well as in Matthew 4:1-11 and Mark 1:12,13) - Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil for 40 days. Jesus's temptation by Satan paralleled that of Adam and Eve in some ways. But, when Jesus was tempted, He succeeded where Adam failed - for Adam succumbed to the temptation of Satan but Jesus resisted and won victory over Satan. And in this victory he conquered - in his humanity in the same way Adam had failed in his humanity.

From the time of the temptation forward then, Jesus showed himself victorious over every aspect of sin - whether death, or disease, or killer winds, or unruly seas, or demonic forces - and He showed Himself victorious over these aspects of sin by delivering people from them, while remaining free from them Himself - by keeping the whole Law of God, walking in God's commands and depending on his Father in everything, as Adam, our father could of dine and should have done.

So, when we read the gospels, we are meeting Jesus Christ; and we are learning about His life and about His work. But there is something else in play. As we read the gospels, we are observing as Jesus Christ proves Himself worthy to be God's human redeemer, deliverer and savior. Proving Himself worthy to be the Redeemer/Deliverer/Savior had to happen FIRST, before Jesus could defeat sin, death and the devil on the cross. And, he pulled it off - and so, in

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John 17 Jesus says to the Father, I have glorified you on earth by completing the work you sent me to do. Now, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed (v.4-5). He prayed this BEFORE he went to the cross - and this had to be, because before Jesus could go to the cross, He had to prove Himself worthy to do so.

Once we understand this, we can then understand what is taking place in Revelation chapter five. Look there with me. The gospels speak to us about Jesus's life while on earth - from his birth, through his death, to his ascension.

What we have in Revelation chapter 5, in the form of a vision which was given to John the Apostle, are events that took place before the throne of God - the Ancient of Days - AFTER Jesus was crucified, buried, rose and ascended.

Revelation chapter four is the stage upon which the events of chapter 5 take place. In Revelation chapter 4 John saw a throne and He who sat on it (God the Father, or the Ancient of Days, acc. to Daniel 7:9-10). He also saw four living creatures - and these four living creatures are powerful angels - the Cherubim - and they also represent all created life on earth; we also have 24 elders, who are heavenly representatives of the people of God; and we have perpetual worship of God as the creator and sustainer of all things. That is the stage. And following this stage, chapter five contains a drama in three movements:

The first movement - the first act of the drama reveals an **insurmountable** problem (vv.1-4); and this problem revolves around a scroll, which cannot be opened because no-one is worthy;

The second movement - the second act of the drama - reveals the **solution** to this insurmountable problem (vv.5-7);

The third movement - the third act of the drama - reveals **the response** this solution brings before the throne of God (vv.8-14);

Act One - poses a seemingly **insurmountable problem**. We learn from 5:1 that in the right hand - that is, the place of power and authority - of He who sat on the throne was a scroll, with writing within and on the back and sealed with seven seals.

A scroll, in John's day, consisted of pieces of parchment rolled up in a roll and placed on a round dowel or stick, with another round stick inside, OR it would consist of a piece of parchment folded into sections, like one has with a hand fan. If the scroll was a roll, it would be sealed with a seal or more than one, after being rolled up and tied tight; but if it was the latter type, there would be a seal securing each fold. Writing would be on the inside of the roll, or the inside of the different folded parts, and sometimes the writing would be on both sides of the parchment. John describes a scroll like this, with **seven seals**.

What is written upon this scroll? The scroll contains the all wise counsel of God - His plans, His decrees, particularly in regards to the redemption and deliverance of the world from sin and death; and of His judgements; and the seven seals symbolize that the information contained in the scroll is full and complete. That is what was written on the scroll. Addressing this, one of the most ancient commentators:

St. Andrew of Caesarea observes that this scroll "contains the most wise memory of God" in which are registered all things, the very "depths of the decrees of God".

William Hendrikson writes, "It represents God's eternal plan, His decree which is all comprehensive".

Greg Beale says of the scroll, "This scroll represents the judgement of God as the rest of the book explains".

I believe each of these commentators is generally right - and when we consider this in more detail this, we have a scroll that contains ***the secret counsels of God, where His plan for glorifying Himself and His Son, delivering His world, redeeming a people for Christ, and the judgement of the evil world system and those who rule it, are contained and explained. The defeat of death is here. The defeat of Satan is here. The salvation of Christ's bride is here. The plan for a new, redeemed heaven and earth is here. And the seven seals denote that God's decrees - His plans - are complete and fully disclosed.***

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This scroll contains the whole script for the whole drama of the world and redemption. And because this scroll contains these plans of God, there is a problem, posed as a question. A strong angel cries out, "**Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?**" (v.2); and the answer is given (v.3) "**And no-one in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it**". Why not?

Because the content of the scroll demanded that the person who would open it and look into it - the person who would break the scrolls seals, be WORTHY! And there was NO ONE in heaven, on earth or under the earth, who was. Why? Because ALL people in heaven, on earth or under the earth are flawed - sinful - and unworthy not only to approach the throne of God but to take the scroll and open it and its seals. Verse 4 tells us that this caused John the weep bitterly. Why would he weep? He had been told that he would be shown what would take place in the near future - but if no-one could open up the script, he would never know. And he knew all people of the human race were not worthy.

This ends the first act.

The second act begins in verse five, and presents the **solution to the insurmountable problem**, when one of the elders steps forward and says to John, "Stop it!" That is the implication of the Greek. The elder tells John, "Weep no more". That is a command. Then the elder says, "**behold, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that He can open the scroll and its seven seals.**" (v.5) - **And between the throne and the four living creatures and the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.**

Who is this Lamb? He is given two titles taken from the OT - He is the Lion of Judah (from Gen. 49:9-10) and the Root of David (from Isa. 11: 1-2; 10). Each of these references is to the Messiah - and so John learns that the Lamb, standing is equated with the Messiah.

This LAMB Has seven horns and seven eyes - symbolizing that this Lamb has perfect and complete power and total and complete knowledge.

Further, He was victorious through SUFFERING. The Greek behind the English phrase "as though it had been slain" is a perfect participle - which presents an abiding condition in the present as a result of the past act of being slain. Put another way, John learns that this Lamb, slain in the past, abides as the once slain Lamb of God - standing in the presence of God - actively.

Often at Easter, Christians sing that strong hymn, Crown Him with many Crowns - and one of the stanzas of that song goes like this: **Crown Him the Lord of Love, behold His hands and side; Rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified** - and this is what John grasps! And the elder told John that this Lion - this Root -this Lamb, is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals. We might say, it is this Lamb, slain and standing, who can take the scroll, open the seals, and reveal its content - content which is the message God gave to Him to reveal to his servants, as we read in the first verse of the book of Revelation.

Question is, what makes this Lamb worthy to open the scroll and its seals? Do you remember what I said earlier this evening, about how, after Jesus was born, and before He could fill the role of redeemer and deliverer, He first had to **prove Himself worthy to BE the redeemer and deliverer?** Do you remember how I said the gospels reveal not only Jesus's life and work, but also, as we read the gospels, we are **observing as Jesus Christ proves Himself worthy** to be God's redeemer, deliverer and savior? Remember that?

Well, He did it! Jesus proved Himself worthy. He learned obedience through the things that he suffered as He followed the will of His Father while He was on earth. Jesus kept the whole Law and didn't offend in even one point. He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. He lived His life in such a way so as to qualify to be worthy to fulfill the role of redeemer, deliverer and savior - and he died and rose, and ascended - because he proved worthy, before the Lord God! And as a result, Jesus was given something. **He was given a NAME that is high above every name** that is named, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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I am reminded of Philippians 2 when I read this statement about Jesus. No one in heaven, on earth or under the earth was found who was worthy to take the scroll and open it and its seals - but the Lamb, who proved Himself worthy while he was on earth, and who was given the name that is high above every name, of those in heaven, on earth or under the earth - HE it is who will open this scroll. And so he it is, who will reveal to His servants the message God gave to Him - the message contained in the scroll - which contains the eternal plans of God!

What was the result of the Lamb's worthiness, the proclamation of it and the Lamb approaching the throne and taking the scroll? That is what Act 3 in our drama is about - vv. 8-14 - where we see the **response around the throne, when the solution to the insurmountable problem is revealed.**

Listen as I read vv. 8 to 14 and listen for a recurring theme. Did you hear a word that recurred? Worthy are YOU!! Worthy is the Lamb!! And because the Lamb is worthy, people from every tribe, language, people and nation are and will be redeemed - and all of us who have faith in Christ are redeemed - for the Lamb, the Root of David, the Lion of Judah, has conquered by His obedience, through the cross, and by the resurrection from the dead!!

And the result of His conquest was that, upon ascending back to heaven, he took the scroll, opened its seals, and victory and redemption began to unfold - and continues to unfold today - and will continue until victory is final and Christ returns in victory to rule and reign forever. Amen!1