

WORTHY TO REDEEM

SERIES: WAKE UP



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Revelation 5:1-14

11th Message

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Why do we take pictures when a President signs a bill into law? The President at his desk with a fancy pen, signing a piece of paper. Nothing spectacular is happening. It's just a man writing his name.

But it is a symbolic moment. In the time leading up to that moment, many steps had been taken in line with the way our country is governed. Someone introduced a bill; the appropriate committee reviews the bill and makes a recommendation; the House of Representatives debates the merits of the bill, and eventually a vote is taken. Then the Senate follows many of the same steps, and if and when it is approved, the bill is sent to the President; he sits down with cameras ready to sign the bill into law.

But more importantly than the time leading up to that moment is what will happen after the bill is signed. Presumably, this bill represents a law that will make things better. People wanted this new law because they wanted to improve things. So once the President signs the bill, it should make things better.

We are a self-governing people. Our laws are meant to reflect the will of the people. This is the process by which the will of the people gets enacted and eventually enforced in our domain.

How does the will of God get enacted and enforced in his domain? If God is the ruler, how does his rule get passed down? Does he sign things into law? Are his ideas debated? Who enforces his will?

If you look around the world, it may seem like God's system isn't working very well. Last week we saw a stunning picture of God Almighty sitting on his throne. Elders and creatures are praising him for his unmatched power. But if God is so Almighty—if he is sitting on his throne—why does the world look the way it does? Why is there so much pain? So much injustice? So much suffering?

How does the will of God get enacted in the world? When will the will of God get enacted in the world? Who will bring God's sovereign and perfect rule to this place?

Today we're continuing our series in the book of Revelation entitled *Wake Up*. Our hope in studying this book is that we get a vision of what is really happening on a spiritual level in our world. We will peek behind the curtain and see the spiritual realm, and it will wake us up to live better in our world.

The overriding pastoral concern throughout this book is to help followers of Jesus who are suffering to make sense of their pain and remain faithful for the long haul. The purpose is hope and perseverance.

Last week we saw the throne room of the Almighty God. We looked around. We listened to what was being said. Today we watch as the King begins to act. The King looks for someone who is capable of bringing his rule to earth. Finally, he finds one who is worthy to redeem.

Last week we saw the first great gift that God gives everyone: the gift of creation. Today we'll see the second great gift which God offers to everyone: the gift of redemption. Together those gifts represent the work of God in this world. They form the basis for the big story of this world. They form the foundation of the Gospel.

Our passage this morning will lead us on an emotional rollercoaster. We go from the awe and majesty of seeing the king to weeping in despair for the state of the world. Then we see Jesus step into the scene and watch the crescendo of worship erupt until all of creation is overcome by the glory of Jesus.

Our goal will be to allow ourselves to go on that journey. We want to weep with John and worship with the angels. We want to feel the brokenness of this world deeply so that our worship of Jesus is true and well-founded.

Weeping for the world

Our passage picks up from where we left off last week. John was invited into the throne room of the Almighty God. We heard the elders and the four living creatures praising God in turn. The scene continues.

Revelation 5:1-4:

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

John looks at the one on the throne, and he is holding a scroll. So much of this is foreign imagery for us: the throne, the scroll, the seals. But think back to the President in the Oval Office signing a bill into law. That's probably the closest analogy we could have for what's going on here.

Our laws are the will of the people. This scroll is the will of the King. It is his edict, his pronouncement, his intentions for the kingdom that he rules.

In Daniel 7:9-10, we hear about a similar vision where the Ancient of Days ascends to his throne, takes his seat, thousands of servants stood before him, and the books were opened. What happened after the books were opened is that the will of God was enacted.

People have all sorts of opinions about what this scroll actually refers to. I think the most compelling suggestion is that this is the book containing God's plan of judgment and redemption. This is how the world will be made right. This scroll represents the vehicle for the will of the King to be enacted throughout his kingdom.

The other day I was heading home and needed to cook something, so I texted my daughter at home and asked her to turn on the oven, so it was preheated by the time I arrived. That text message was the vehicle by which my will as king over my domain was enacted within my kingdom. Because of that text message and the dutiful obedience of my daughter, when I arrived home, the oven was preheated.

But this is not how things play out in Revelation 5. The scroll appears, and the angel asks, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" The angel is asking the most important question for any King to have an answer for. Who is able to represent that King within his kingdom and enact his will. Who is capable of making the kingdom run in accordance with the King's wishes.

The tragic answer is no one.

Doesn't this scene ring true with our experience?

Look around. We believe that God is on his throne. We are gathered here to praise him. But when we look at the world we live in, we are deeply aware that things on this earth are not the way they ought to be. God's will has not been fully enacted here.

The will of God for his creation is sealed. No one has yet brought it to pass. This is comforting because it validates our experience. We feel like something is holding God back from making things right, but we wonder how a sovereign God could be frustrated. This is the answer.

In response to this realization, John does the only reasonable thing: he falls apart and weeps loudly. He recognizes this great disconnect—the chasm between how things ought to be and how they are. When he hears that no one can bridge that chasm and no one can set things right, he weeps in despair.

Our story doesn't end here. We'll see Jesus appear in a few minutes. But the vision doesn't just have him walking up and taking the scroll. There is this moment described in verse 3, "no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll." There is a moment where we don't yet have the confidence that things will be set right.

We need to stay there for a bit. Our text creates this drama as an invitation for us to be there with John. To weep at the brokenness of the world. To lament that it doesn't look like anyone will be able to fix it. To weep for the world.

Things were supposed to be different. When God created this magnificent universe, he chose one of his creations to represent him throughout his domain. He installed his image to make sure that his will was done throughout his creation.

Genesis 1:28 records God commanding his image to "subdue the earth" and "have dominion" over other creatures. We were supposed to be the ones to make God's will reality throughout his creation. We were supposed to represent him.

We were supposed to be worthy of opening the scroll. But things fell apart. We can't be trusted anymore. We are rebellious and broken. When we get power, we don't

always use it in line with God's intentions. We aren't worthy of opening the scroll. I think John wept in part because he wanted to be able to open the scroll. He wanted to be able to represent this King upon the earth.

I feel this moment so deeply sometimes.

There are so many things I want to fix: things in my own life, the life of my family, this church, our community, the world. And while there are some things I am called to step into, there are huge lists of things that I can't fix. I can't make them look like how they ought to look. Lately, I've been doing a lot more weeping. Mourning for the broken things of this world.

Sometimes it seems like nothing can fix this world. That's the moment that John finds himself in. It's an important moment for us to take seriously. The Bible never rushes past pain to get to the good stuff. God's revelation never ignores or minimizes or shames hurt and struggle. This world is not how it ought to be.

You're not supposed to lose a child. You're not supposed to get cancer. You're not supposed to struggle with mental health or broken relationships or a constant sense of failure. Parenting isn't supposed to be as hard as it, marriage is supposed to go smoother, friendships are supposed to be fulfilling and refreshing.

God's creation is broken. He is sovereign. He is in control. But his will hasn't been fully realized yet. And for that, we weep. We weep for ourselves. We weep for our friends and family. We weep for the world.

But we don't weep forever. We don't weep forever. Now we're ready to pick up where our passage leads us next.

The worthy redeemer

We began with a cosmic question, "Who is worthy to open the scroll?" At first, there was no one. But the rest of the passage contains four answers to this question. The answers build and grow in content and energy. The first answer comes in Revelation 5:5-7.

Revelation 5:5-7:

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

Doesn't everyone want a hero? We think the next quarterback will save our football team. We think the perfect romantic partner will fill that void in our heart. We think a great boss will make work perfect. We think the right President can fix our country. Something within us is convinced that a hero is out there.

The elder speaks and reveals our hero. Weep no more. There is one who is worthy.

At first, we are told he is a Lion who conquers. That's the kind of hero we want. But when we look further, in between the throne and the creatures, we don't see a Lion. We see a lamb standing, but he looks like he had been slain.

The lamb imagery is sown throughout Scripture. Thousands of years earlier God has saved his people through the blood of a Lamb spread on their doorframe. Then the prophet Isaiah spoke of one who would be led as a sheep to the slaughter. Jesus comes on the scene and is greeted by John the Baptist, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

This goes to the heart of the paradox of Revelation. We keep hearing about conquering throughout this book. But then we hear what is meant by conquering. In this book, you conquer by suffering.

After the first answer, we hear more about this lamb. First one of the elders spoke. The Lamb took the scroll. And then we hear the elders together with the four living creatures respond.

Revelation 5:8-10:

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. 9 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, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

In the Old Testament, a new song was sung as an expression for praise when God gave his people an exceptional victory. Enemies were defeated, and a new song was the response. This is the victory the Lamb has achieved. He has taken the scroll. He is the one who can set things right. In the words that are sung, we can see how things are set right.

"You were slain." It is the death of the Lamb which achieves the victory. Notice there isn't a reference yet to the resurrection. In this praise, it is the suffering of the Lamb which makes him worthy.

For a people knee-deep in their own suffering, this is incredibly powerful. The prayers of the saints are in bowls like incense. These are the pleadings for vindication for those who are suffering. God's people asking him to set things right.

It is suffering that conquers. It's not about persevering in your suffering until you conquer. You win when you suffer well for Jesus. It doesn't matter whether you're suffering because you're a Christian or just suffering because of the brokenness of the world. If you believe in Jesus, your suffering is a kind of conquering.

But the suffering of Jesus did something important. "By your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."

This Lamb took the very people who broke this world, and he ransomed them. He paid the price for them to be included. And no one is excluded. This is a fully represented group of people. No group is left out. Jesus ransoms people from every demographic.

Then he makes them "a kingdom and priests" and "they shall reign on the earth."

This is everything set right. This is the restoration of God's original creation. The whole world is God's kingdom. We failed to be obedient to him. But God ransomed us. He made us new. And the end of the story has us reigning on the earth, just as Adam and Eve did in the garden.

This is the second great gift. First, God created the world. But then everything broke. This world fell apart. And so God responded by going to extraordinary

measures to fix what was broken. He himself tasted death so that his creation could be restored to life. This redemption is offered to anyone, regardless of who you are or what you've done. God redeems this world.

We have to weep for the world because the pain is so real. But when we see the Redeemer, our mourning is turned into dancing. We sing a new song. We praise Jesus for what he has done. We worship the Redeemer.

A few years ago my family had a problem with our plumbing. All of our drains were backing up. So we called a plumber, and someone came out. He spent a bunch of time, finally snaking some vent line from our roof. When he was done, he drew me a diagram to show me how complicated our plumbing was. He told me there are only two plumbers in the whole Bay Area who could have fixed this. Lucky for me that I called one of them.

That's a bold claim. But it is an even bolder claim to say that Jesus is the only one who could open this scroll. That's why we worship him. He is unique.

It has to be a human who opens this scroll because God created humans as his image. This was our responsibility. But all humanity had fallen. No one is untouched by sin. So no human is worthy.

But Jesus: the god who became man. He is uniquely qualified to open this scroll. Only he can redeem what has been broken. We don't appreciate Jesus or admire Jesus or look up to Jesus or even simply love Jesus. We worship him because he is unique. He alone can redeem.

Expansive worship

The worship has only begun. The focus has shifted now from the scroll to the one who will open it. This scene is about Jesus: the Lion, the Lamb, the Messiah, the one who is uniquely capable of redeeming this world.

First, a single elder spoke. Then the elders and creatures sang a song. In Revelation 5:11-12, the angels join in.

Revelation 5:11-12:

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, 12 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!"

Can you see John looking around and hearing this growing sound of myriads of angels joining in the praise?

The first four words this crowd uses of Jesus focuses on his attributes. He has power and wealth and wisdom and might. These are kingly attributes. If a king is powerful and wealthy and wise and strong, then he will be able to lead his kingdom well. He can provide and protect and give his subjects peace and security.

The next three words are responses of praise. Honor and glory and blessing. This is what you give a good king who can rule well and provide for his people. Jesus is the King we want. He is able. He is worthy.

The praise only gets more intense. Now with each successive element of praise, more and more voices have joined the party. Now, everyone joins in. The elders, the creatures, the angels, and everyone within all of creation.

Revelation 5:13:

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!"

Sometimes we forget what praise is. Praise is what you do naturally and spontaneously and from deep within you when you experience something incredible. Praise isn't forced. It isn't work. It erupts from within us.

Here we see all of creation overcome with the uniqueness and majesty of Jesus the Christ: the Lion who was slain as a Lamb. Ancient Jews had a three-tiered understanding of creation: heaven, earth, and under the earth. Every creature from every tier of every domain in creation is joining with this song.

No one is excluded. No one holds back. No one is unaware of who Jesus is and what he has done in the world.

This is the original viral video. It has spread everywhere. And the reason it has spread is because of what Jesus has been able to do. Everyone everywhere praises the Redeemer. We weep for the world. Then we worship Jesus as redeemer. Finally, we expect praise to expand.

I like cookies. Chocolate chip cookies are my favorite. Dark but sweet chocolate. Moist vanilla flavored cookie dough. The taste of butter and sugar mixed and baked. They're good, right? Now imagine you came across the perfect cookie. Every aspect was exactly what you'd always hoped for. And they were healthy on top of that. Even if you ate five or twenty, you didn't feel terrible and hate yourself. And, of course, there was an unlimited supply.

You'd enjoy the cookie, but you'd want to tell others about it. You'd tell your friends. They'd tell their friends. It would go viral. Tweets and Instagram and Facebook Live and virtual reality mind messages or whatever else is coming would spread this cookie everywhere because everyone would be so excited about it.

Now imagine you met the one who was capable of opening the scroll. The human who could restore God's reign. The King who ruled perfectly and caused his people to carry on his rule. The one perfect in power and wealth and wisdom and might.

You saw him and experienced him and knew what an incredible thing you beheld. You'd be overcome by praise. He is the one I've been waiting for. He is the one who fixes my world and my life and everything that is broken. You'd tell others. They'd tell others. The praise would grow. Others would join in. Eventually, everyone everywhere will praise Jesus.

This is where the story is going. Eventually, everyone will recognize the beauty of Jesus. Our praise this morning is just a taste of what all of creation will do together. We will be overcome with how amazing Jesus is. Praise will erupt from within us.

And after all the energy and emotion of this worship, the crowd of creation climaxes in relief.

Revelation 5:14:

And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

They are exhausted from the intensity of worship. The creatures simply declare this to be so: "Amen". The elders fall down in complete and humble worship.

You have worshipped the Redeemer. You have seen him in his glory, and you have understood why Jesus is to be praised.

Conclusion

These two chapters: Revelation 4 and 5 tell most of the story of God's work in the world. In chapter 4, we see God upon his throne. He is praised because he is and because he created us to be. God's first great gift is creation. At the beginning of chapter 5, we taste the despair and hopelessness of a world that can sometimes seem broken beyond repair. We weep for the pain and suffering in our lives and all around us.

But then we meet the conqueror. The one who redeemed through his suffering. The only one who is capable of taking up the human responsibility of God's image on earth, and fulfilling it perfectly and then suffering in order to restore us and transform us back into the people God intended us to be. God's second great gift is redemption.

In the chapters which follow, we will see what happens as the seals on this scroll are broken. We will see what it looks like for a King to implement his will throughout his domain. Kings do not conquer quietly. The powers of evil which are deeply lodged in all of creation must be overcome with force. There is no other way. Evil doesn't give up easily.

But before we get to the opening of the scroll, we'll take a break to celebrate Advent. I wish I could say we planned this perfectly, but God was at it more than we were. Now is a perfect time to stop and remember the coming of the Redeemer. The Advent season is all about celebrating the first coming of the one who is worthy to open the scroll and looking forward to that day when he returns to open the scroll once and for all.

We have seen the throne room of God. We have wept for the brokenness of the world. And we have celebrated the arrival of the one who is worthy to redeem. May you know the redemption of your suffering and look for the redemption of all of God's creation. And may you respond in worship.