

## REV 5:1-14—WORTHY IS THE LAMB

**INTRO:** Merry Christmas everybody. I think probably all of us recognize that, as Andy Williams sang many years ago, Christmas can be “the most wonderful time of the year”—parties, presents, and all that (leaving aside the “scary ghost stories”). On the other hand, Christmas can also be one of the most stressful times of the year—tons of things to do; family members get together who haven’t seen each other in a long time; latent tensions boil to the surface. And then there’s the whole issue of unmet expectations. People invest so much in Christmas—financially as well as emotionally—because it’s supposed to be such a special time of the year. All of this gets exacerbated by the nonstop Christmas songs, Christmas movies, and, more importantly, the nostalgia of childhood when, for many of us, Christmas was sort of a magical time.

Christians who want to put Christ first at Christmastime are not immune to any of this. In particular, Christians are not immune to the nostalgia or the sentimentality of Christmas. What do I mean? I mean every Christmas we hear the so-called “Christmas Story.” You may recall Linus in “A Charlie Brown Christmas” telling us the “true meaning of Christmas” by reading from **Luke 2** [**READ Luke 2:8-14—KJV**].

At Christmastime we all tend to think of the baby Jesus in the manger and “peace on earth, goodwill toward men.” There is nothing wrong with that, of course. However, is that *really* the “true meaning” of Christmas? I don’t think so. In the passage that Linus read, the focus is **v.11** [**READ**]. Yet the Christmastime emphasis on *baby* Jesus and the *manger* tends to obscure the real meaning of Christmas found in **v.11**—which has to do with *why* Jesus came to earth and *what* Jesus came to do. The baby in the manger tends to make us think sentimental thoughts about **“the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes”** instead of being awed by who he is and what he has done. Understanding who he is and what he has done should lead us to worship him, devote our lives to him, and follow in his footsteps—not just think, “Awww, the little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay.”

We are doing a series in the book of Revelation, and today’s passage, Rev 5, is an excellent passage for Christmas, because it tells us who Jesus is and what he accomplished on earth. **Rev 4-5** go together because **ch. 4** sets the scene for **ch. 5**—which is where the action is, so to say. So other than a couple of references to **ch. 4**, I will deal exclusively with **ch. 5** [**READ**].

**PROP:** Jesus Christ alone has the right to our lives because of who he is and what he has done.

**O/S:** We will see why Jesus alone has the right to our lives as we consider: (1) What Jesus has done; (2) Who Jesus is—and, as we will see, what Jesus has done and who he is are intimately related; finally, we will consider the response that who he is and what he has done requires of us.

### **I. What Jesus has done**

First, what is the “book” (or “scroll” as the ESV calls it) referred to in v.1? The book is seen by most commentators—correctly, I believe—as God’s plan of judgment and redemption of the world. The image of the book derives from **Ezek 2-3** which, in context, dealt with judgment on Israel. However, as we have seen in earlier chapters, Revelation takes OT images and universalizes them. As we saw last week, Revelation in particular takes things applying to Israel and applies them to the church—the new, true, spiritual Israel.

The “seals” of the book signify the author’s ownership of it. **v.1** makes clear that it is God’s book, since it was **“in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”** The opening of the book and the breaking of the seals does more than just reveal what’s inside. Rather, breaking the seals and opening the book imply that what is contained in the book is *put into effect*. We see this particularly in **ch. 6** where **vv.1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 12** describe the breaking of the seals of the book. Then immediately upon the seals being broken **ch.6** then describes that what is related to each seal is put into effect.

This leads us to Jesus—because in Rev 5, v.3 tells us that it is Jesus who is the only one “in heaven or on the earth or under the earth who was able to open the book or to look into it.” What has Jesus done to qualify him to open the book and break its seals? In **Rev 5** we see a double image of Jesus: in **v.5** he is **“the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, who has overcome so as to open the book and the seven seals,”** but then in **v.6** we see **“a Lamb standing, as if slain.”** These are not two separate beings but one and the same: the Lion IS the Lamb.

The Lion connotes strength, victory, power, lordship. And **“the root of David”** indicates that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises made to David, most especially the Davidic Covenant in **2 Samuel 7** in which God promised to David, **“I will raise up your seed after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom . . . and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”** BTW, in **Acts 2**, on the Day of Pentecost, the whole point of Peter’s sermon was that, in his resurrection and ascension, Jesus had fulfilled those promises and even how is reigning from the throne of David in heaven.

The Lamb as if slain is just the opposite picture. It indicates sacrifice—the Passover Lamb—the Lamb as seen in **Isa 53:7**: **“He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, he did not open his mouth.”**

How can these two opposites be brought together? *That* is the amazing reason for Christmas. *That* is why Jesus Christ is unlike any other person who has ever lived or who will ever live. That is why Christianity is unlike any other religion. And that is why the real God is unlike the god of any other religion.

What these two images are telling us is that Christ is not victorious *in spite* of his death on the cross, but his death on the cross IS the victory that makes him worthy to open the book and break the seals. In this country, growing up with a Christian heritage, we tend not to see how unique this is. There are many religions in the world: Christianity; Islam; Buddhism; Hinduism; traditional tribal religions. But there are only two *kinds* of religion in the world: Christianity and everything else.

The reason is that, when you boiled things down, every other religion in the world basically says: “If you want god or the gods to accept you and take you to heaven or nirvana when you die, it’s up to *you*—to work hard enough, make enough sacrifices, deny yourself enough things, and do enough good deeds.” The problem is that all those religions are doomed to failure because you *can’t* make enough sacrifices or do enough good deeds because there is something wrong inside all of us. It is called the power of indwelling sin. As a result, our hearts are corrupt and that affects everything we do—and we can’t change our own hearts no matter how hard we try. So why would God accept our sacrifices, when the person making the sacrifices is himself unclean and unholy?

This is where Christianity is different from every other religion in the world. According to the Bible, God basically said, “You’re worse than you think you are. You think your problem is external because you do bad things from time to time. But your real problem is internal; it is the heart—and you can’t fix that. But I am holy, and cannot abide in the presence of sin. If I were to accept you to heaven the way you are, you would end up turning it into hell. But I love you. So I will do for you what you cannot do for yourselves, no matter how hard you try.”

That is why God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He lived the life we should have lived. That qualified him to stand in our shoes, to substitute himself for us. So he died the death we should have died and paid the price for sin that otherwise we would have to pay, but couldn’t. And in his death on the cross, coupled with his resurrection and ascension back to the Father, he accomplished for us what we could not do for ourselves and what no one else could do—he not only paid the price for our sin but gives us a new heart, a new life. As **v.9** says, he purchased us with his blood. But more than that, as **v.10** goes on to say, he has made us a kingdom and priests to God and we will reign on the earth.

No one else did, or even claimed to do, what Jesus did. Shortly before he died, Muhammad cursed Jews and Christians; ordered the pagans out of Arabia, yearned for the highest status in Islamic heaven; but begged Allah for forgiveness because, he said, **“though I am the Apostle of Allah, yet I do not know what Allah will do to me.”** Buddha’s last words were, **“Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation.”** Jesus didn’t beg for his own forgiveness, but said, **“Father, forgive them.”** Jesus didn’t say, “Work hard,” but said **“It is finished.”**

If you have never given your life to Jesus, do it now. Give him your life. You can do it in the sanctity of your own heart. You can’t hang onto your own life anyway. But Jesus voluntarily gave up *his* life to give us new life, everlasting life. He gave up his own heart to give us a new heart. That is the ultimate meaning of Christmas.

But what Jesus did is intimately related to:

## **II. Who Jesus is**

Jesus could stand in our shoes because he was a real human being. But he was more than a human being. He was God who became a human being. God is a complex being, unlike anything or anyone else. He is what is known as Trinity: three distinct persons, but only one God. Our finite minds cannot fully grasp this. But this is one reason why we know that Christianity was not just made up—because no one who is making up a religion would put at its very center a doctrine that appears logically impossible. Yet the Bible over and over forces us to the conclusion that God is Trinity, because the Bible is God’s own revelation of who he is, not just a book made up by people. And so we see that picture here in **Rev 5**. For example:

In **v.6** we see the Lamb described as “having 7 horns and 7 eyes, which are the 7 spirits of God, sent into all the earth.” In **4:8** the Lord God is described as **“the Almighty.”** Here in **v.6** we see a visual picture of that. I say that because, in the Bible, “horns” typically convey the ideas of strength and power. The number 7 typically is a number connoting fullness or completion. IOW, the Lamb has all power—which is another way to say that he is omnipotent. Only God is omnipotent. The Lamb is God.

The Lamb is connected with the HS. **v.6** talks about the 7 spirits of God. That same phrase was also

used in **ch.1**. As we discussed when we were in **ch.1**, the “7 spirits” is a figurative reference to the Holy Spirit. The number seven, again, suggests the *fullness* of the Spirit. The image of 7 eyes here in **v.6** indicates the fullness and completeness of God’s vision—his knowledge, and understanding—IOW, his omniscience. That’s why Jesus could say in **chs. 2-3** to multiple different churches, **“I know your deeds.”**

In **v.6** also says that the “7 spirits” or the HS is “sent out into all the earth.” While he was still on earth, Jesus said that the Father would be sending the HS to those who are united with Jesus. Now here in **v.6** it tells us that the Spirit *is* “sent out into all the earth.” IOW, it is through Jesus death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection and ascension that the Spirit has been sent into the world. The Spirit is the agent by which God’s plan of judgment and redemption is carried out.

In **vv. 11-12** every kind of creature in heaven—millions and billions of them—are crying out that Jesus is worthy to receive “power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” That is significant, because that is what the heavenly creatures said of God himself in **4:11**—“**Worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power.**” In **5:13** every created being said, “**To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.**” And in **v.14** the heavenly creatures fall down and worship. IOW, they are acknowledging and worshipping Jesus just as they worship God the Father.

When we put this all together, all of these images convey the distinct members of the Triune God—Father, Son (the Lion-the Lamb), and the Holy Spirit. And yet these images not only are conveying the distinct members of the Trinity but also are conveying their essential oneness. They all are related, and they all have the essential attributes of Godhood: omnipotence; omniscience; dominion over the whole earth; glory; and honor and worship.

Yet there is something else that these verses are telling us about God that, again, reveals that Christianity and the real God—the God of the Bible—are amazing, unique, and could not have been made up. The gods of every other religion in the world are what you would expect people to think of when they think of a supernatural being. The Allah of Islam is characterized by power, but is basically unknowable. Eastern religions conceive of the supernatural basically as impersonal forces. Traditional tribal religions consider the gods to be basically idiosyncratic beings who are sort of capricious and need to be appeased by various sacrifices and rituals.

But here in **Rev 5** we see something vastly different. It is the slain Lamb, the sacrificial Lamb, who alone is worthy to open the book and break the seals *because of his sacrifice*. In **v.8** the heavenly creatures fall down to worship the Lamb, and in **vv. 9-10** and again in **vv.11-12** they sing a new song and praise and worship the Lamb *precisely because of what he did on the cross*. What this is saying is the sacrificial death of Christ is part of the divine identity—IOW, it goes to the essence of who God is-his nature-his character—just as much as his omnipotence and his omniscience are part of his identity, his nature and character.

No other religion even dreams of the idea of a god who suffers. No one inventing a religion would ever come up with the idea of a God who leaves his glory to become a servant, who suffers and dies for people who oppose him—all because he loves us. Yet *that* is who the *real* God is. That is what Jesus did. That is why we celebrate Christmas.

Which leads us to:

### **III. The response that who Jesus is and what he has done requires of us**

There are two things that this passage implies for us. We have already mentioned the first, namely, acknowledge who Jesus is and what he has done and turn to him as the Lord of your life. If you are not attracted by this amazing person, then there is something dreadfully wrong.

But if you have done that, then the only proper response of our lives is indicated in **vv. 11-14**, namely, to worship him. What does that mean? **v.13** talks about giving him “**blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.**” In church we sing about him, and in our lives we may praise and thank him. And that’s all good. But I think that misses the essence of what worship really is.

When we put **v.13** together with the “new song” of **vv. 9-10**, I think we can better understand what worshipping the Lamb implies. **vv. 9-10** tell us that Jesus **purchased us for God**, and made us to be **a kingdom and priests to our God**. That is a present reality, as John said in **Rev 1:9** where he said that he is our brother and fellow partaker—present tense—in **the kingdom**. This means: first, we don’t own ourselves, because Christ purchased us—IOW, he bought and paid for us. Second, our primary loyalty is now to God, who owns us, and to his kingdom of which we are now members. Third, a priest basically is an intermediary between God and people: a priest represents God to the people and people to God.

This means that, for many of us, we need to make a fundamental change of mind about who we are and the lives we are living. How can we represent God to the people in our lives—our friends, neighbors, co-

workers—if our values and priorities are pretty much like everyone else’s and we think, speak, and act pretty much like everyone else? How can we give **“blessing and honor and glory and dominion”** to God if he is not the one who is motivating us, if he is not intimately involved in what we do with our spare time, what we do with our money, how we treat people?

How that plays out in our individual lives will differ from person to person. But I think we need to be serious about this—and what better time of the year to get serious about Jesus than this? Singing Christmas songs is a good thing. But if it just leaves us with sort of a nostalgic or sentimental feeling, then that is the exact opposite result that Jesus wants for us and the exact opposite reason why he came into the world. He came to deliver us from the power of sin and death and to make us new—new on the inside, which will lead to a new life on the outside.

**CONCL:** Jesus alone has the right to our lives because of who he is and what he has done. The Bible tells us that, if we are united with Christ, then we have the mind of Christ and the Spirit and his Word. We should be using them and depending upon them all the time. Let us strive to use and depend upon Christ’s mind, Spirit, and Word more and more frequently and seriously, so that when we get together this time next year, we will see in ourselves—and others will see in us—lives that reflect the fact that Jesus truly is the Lord of our lives because of who he is and what he has done.