Worthy is the Lamb
Revelation 5:1-14

John is visiting heaven; the scene begins in chapter 4 and in the center of the scene is the throne of God resting on a crystal platform with the splendor of diamond and ruby glory and with an emerald rainbow arching the throne; there is also lightning and thunder near the throne as glorious worship of praise rises from the myriads of angels and saints for the One who sits on the throne; that is God the Father.

Before the throne were the four living creatures, angelic beings, who guard the throne of God and protect His holiness; they do not rest day and night saying, “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (4:8); these cherubs are joined by 24 elders who fall down before the throne and now 28 voices lift up their praise to God the Father; they sing: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and praise; for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created” (4:11).

Chapter 4 is all about offering praise to our heavenly Father for who He is and for what He has done; in chapter 5 the praise shifts from the Father to His Son, Jesus, the Lamb of God who alone is worthy—not only because of what He has done and will yet accomplish, but, He alone is worthy to reveal the judgments that will come upon the earth following the rapture of the Church and the ultimate future of those who put their trust in Him.

The Importance of the Seven Sealed Scroll (5:1-4)

The identity of the scroll... “And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals” (5:1).
1. *The source of the scroll...* The word for scroll in Greek is *biblos*, from where we get the word Bible meaning book; the scroll is in the right hand of the one who sits on the throne and that is God the Father.

In biblical times scrolls were made from 8×10 inch papyrus or bulrush sheets joined together; the lettering was in narrow 3 inch columns, three quarters of an inch between each column with 2½ inch margins top to bottom.

To make the scroll, pith was extracted from the bulrush plant (pith is located in the center of the stem and is a soft, spongy tissue which stores nutriments and transports them throughout the plant); then the plant was cut into thin strips with a sharp knife; rows were laid out vertically and horizontally and intertwined together; they were moistened with water and pressed together with glue; they were beaten with a mallet and smoothed out with a pumice stone; once dried they were rolled on a wooden roller; the scroll was now ready to be written on with ink; some scrolls were made from dried animal skin; the book of Revelation on a scroll would be 15 feet in length.

2. *The sealing of the scroll...* The scroll in the right hand of God was sealed with seven seals; Daniel was told to seal up the words of his prophecy “until the time of the end” (Daniel 12:4); now John sees a scroll that will reveal the events that will take place in the end times.

A seven sealed scroll was a common legal document in ancient Rome; under Roman law marriage contracts, rental agreements, wills, title deeds and all important documents were sealed with seven seals; the seal was a piece of thread tied in a knot to the document and was validated by a witness; the scroll was rolled out further and sealed again before another witness until the document was sealed seven times before seven witnesses; if the document was to be opened, each of the seven witnesses had to be present and each had to break one of the seals.

These scrolls were written on both sides; the outer side contained a summary of the deed while the backside contained the details of the deed; so the scroll in the hand of God is written on both sides; that scroll was God’s last will and testament; as the owner of the universe, it was His title deed for the universe and all the things that were to happen from this point forward; the contents of the scroll begin when we come to chapter six; but first there has to be one found worthy to break the seals and to open the scroll.
The inquiry about who can open the scroll... “Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look at it” (5:2-3).

A strong angel, perhaps Gabriel, whose name means “strength of God” is going throughout heaven shouting, “Who is worthy to open the scroll?” Michael was there but he said not a word; there were ten thousand times ten thousand angels present but they did not say anything; the four living creatures who surrounded the throne likewise kept quiet; the 24 elders before the throne kept silent—as did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, David and all the great patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament who were present; they uttered not a word; neither did any of the twelve apostles or Paul; nor did any of the early church fathers, or the great reformers, or any member of the raptured Church speak out; there was total silence after the strong angel spoke.

The impact on John... “So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it” (5:4). John gets very emotional and begins to cry. That is strange; doesn’t Scripture tell us there is no sorrow or tears in heaven? Revelation 21:4 says, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” How do we explain this? When John is sorrowful and weeping he is in the present heaven; God’s promise to wipe away all tears refers to the New Jerusalem come down out of heaven; that is a promise for when eternity officially begins; in a very limited sense there appears to be some sorrow and tears in the present heaven.

John is weeping because no one was worthy to open the scroll; perhaps we can understand John’s emotions better if we bring him back to earth; bring him back to reality; as a Jew, John expected the true Messiah to establish His kingdom on earth; remember it was John along with his brother James that sent their mother to say to Jesus, “Can my sons sit on your right hand and on your left hand in Your kingdom?” (Matthew 20:20-21); they were expecting the kingdom to come when the Messiah came after He overthrew Rome; it didn’t happen; instead the Jews rejected their Messiah and had Him executed; temporarily the faith of the apostles was crushed until the Messiah arose from the dead; their hope for a Messianic kingdom on earth was again restored.

When Jesus took His apostles to the Mount of Olives from where He would ascend, the apostles still had hope that He would overthrow Rome and set up His
earthly kingdom; they asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6); Jesus told them it wasn’t for them to know the times and seasons, then He told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to descend on them; once He came upon them they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, then in all Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8).

Forty days later the Church began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost; the Church grew rapidly and John had much to do with the growth of that Church; he knew the churches in Asia Minor very well and he served the church in Ephesus at a very old age. He was the last living apostle.

He also saw the decline of the churches and in five of the seven churches to whom the Risen Lord addressed they were so far from serving God that He was coming to shut them down; as he writes the Revelation he sits alone on the isle of Patmos, a prison from which he could not escape; this was not the glory he sought when he asked his mother to ask Jesus if he and his brother could have the chief seats in the kingdom.

When John believes that no one is worthy to open the scroll, it seemed to him at least for the moment that even being in heaven and seeing the very throne of God, that there was no hope; if there was ever a place to know that the power of evil will be broken and that there is a glorious future for the believer it ought to be in heaven; so John gets emotional and weeps for no one was worthy to open the scroll; it’s as though he lost hope.

The Introduction of the One Who is Worthy (5:5-7)

The assurance to John from one of the twenty-four elders... “But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals’” (5:5).

The worthy One is Jesus the Messiah described as “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David”

1. The Lion of Judah... When Jacob the father of Judah gave the final blessing to Judah and his sons, he referred to them as “lion’s whelp” (Genesis 49:9a); Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah whose ensign was a lion; Jesus, the greatest of all to come from that tribe is called “the Lion of Judah”;
Jacob also promised Judah, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between His feet until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people” (Genesis 49:10); Shiloh was a title for the Messiah; the Hebrew word Shiloh means “whose it is”; the scepter was a sign of kingship; the tribe of Judah was the kingly tribe and its scepter would not pass from Judah until Shiloh, the Messiah comes, or “whose it is”; that is, the real king of the Jews is Jesus the Messiah for He is “the Lion of Judah”; in AD 7 the Romans removed the power of the Sanhedrin in Judah from executing the death penalty; this means the power of the scepter passed from Judah and became the reason the Sanhedrin had to turn Jesus over to the Romans for His trials and execution; this would make Jesus 9 to 12 years old when the scepter departed from Judah.

The lion is a ferocious beast with deadly, destructive, power and the elder is telling John there is no need to cry for the Lion of Judah is worthy to open the scroll and His deadly power will soon be unleashed upon an evil, sinful world.

2. The Root of David... Every Jew believed their Messiah would come from the line of David; even the Pharisees referred to the Christ as “the Son of David”; yet David called Him “Lord” (Psalm 110:1); this was a real paradox that baffled the Pharisees (Matthew 22:41-46).

God had made a covenant with David that through his bloodline the Messiah would come and set up an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Luke 1:33).

Jesus is addressed as the King of the Jews in both the titles—“The Lion from the tribe of Judah” and “the Root of David”; when Pilate placed an epitaph on the cross of Christ it read in three languages—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin: “JESUS OF NAZARETH,THE KING OF THE JEWS” (John 19:19); in Hebrew, which reads from right to left, when you take the first letter of each word it spells YHWH, the name of God; though in Hebrew appears : HWHY; Jesus is truly God!

The appearance of the worthy One... “And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a
Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (5:6).

1. The Lion is a Lamb... When the elder said, “The lion has prevailed” (5:5b), John looks for a lion and what does he see but a Lamb; the idea of the Lamb is a unique characteristic of Revelation where Jesus is called the Lamb no fewer than 29 times; Jesus is referred to as the Lamb elsewhere in Scripture; John the Baptist declared such when he first saw Jesus, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29); Peter spoke of “the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19); Isaiah spoke of Him as “a lamb led to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7); but in Revelation there is a different word for lamb arnion, rather than amnos, the normal word for lamb used in the other passages; in Jeremiah 11:19 the LXX uses arnion when the prophet wrote: “I was like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter...”; by using the word arnion for lamb, John wants us to know that the Lamb of God still bears the marks of His sacrifice in the heavenly realm; here is the picture of the pain and humiliation that Jesus suffered when He died on the cross for the sins of the world; in heaven the hands and feet of Jesus still show the scars from the nails that held Him on the cross.

The Lamb is the Lion of Judah and the Lamb is standing; this means the Lamb was alive; the Lamb was slain, but the Lamb lives! here is a significant imagery of the Lamb; the Jewish people understood that the sacrificing of animals could not permanently take away sin; that is why they continued the sacrificial system on a daily basis; all those dead animals could not make man holy before a holy God; but one day a Lamb would be sacrificed that would once and for all time remove sin and bring man permanently into God’s presence; as John sees what he first thought was a lion, turns out to be the Lamb who is alive and standing; He first came as the Lamb but He is getting ready to be the Lion and make His move to destroy Satan.

2. The Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes... Seven is a number of perfection and the seven horns are symbols of His power; He is the all-powerful, sovereign, almighty warrior Lamb; as a Lamb He is ready to take on the forces of Satan and to defeat the evil one.

His seven eyes speak of His Omniscience; “the eyes of the LORD which run to and fro over the whole earth” (Zechariah 7:4); He understands all
and He knows all; His eyes are described as “the seven Spirits of God”; this speaks of the attributes of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2); here, the Holy Spirit is associated with the Lamb in His work to defeat evil—it will be done with the Spirit of the Lord resting on Him with wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, all resulting in the fear of the Lord.

*The act of the worthy One...* “Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne” (5:7).

What a moment as the Lamb takes the seven sealed scroll from the right hand of Father; Jesus is taking from the One who sits on throne the title deed to the universe which He created and which He is taking it back from Satan; He is going to break its seals one at a time and reveal all the events that must take place before Christ makes His second coming appearance to the earth in great glory and power.

Beginning in chapters 6-19 we see where judgments precede His second coming; a time is going to come on the earth that will be like no other time in history; the great Tribulation prophesied by Jesus is now near (Matthew 24:15); the Satan possessed Antichrist is revealed; He comes on the scene to annihilate the Jews and martyr all who become believers and set up His one world government and one world church, while God rains down on the earth one natural disaster after another; it all culminates in the battle of Armageddon in Israel; it is then that Christ comes with His holy angels and the Church to defeat the enemy, cast the Antichrist and False Prophet into hell and put Satan into a bottomless pit for a thousand years; then the Messiah sets up His Millennial Kingdom on earth and rules the world with truth, and righteousness, and justice.

We will learn that once the scroll is opened it is divided into three types of judgments; there are the seven seal judgments with the seventh seal being the first of seven trumpet judgments; with the sounding of the sixth trumpet we come to the middle of the great Tribulation of 3½ years or 1,260 days; the seventh trumpet seems to sound throughout the second half of the tribulation and from out of that trumpet blast comes seven bowls of wrath; then Jesus comes at the end of these great unleashing of judgments to establish His earthly kingdom; this is all set in motion when the Lamb, who alone is worthy, takes the seven sealed scroll from the hand of Him who sits on the throne.
The Initiation of Worship by Singing a New Song (5:8-14)

The reaction to the Lamb taking the scroll... “Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (5:8)... 

1. The worship of the Lamb... The four living creatures fall prostrate before the Lamb and they begin to offer praise to the Lamb that was slain, but is now alive; this praise continues the rest of the chapter.

The praise comes in the form of music as each had a harp and the harp is generally associated with praise and worship; Psalm 33:2 says, “Praise the LORD with the harp”; (see also Psalm 98:5; 147:7); there is going to be musical instruments in heaven as we will sing praises to the Lamb who was slain for our salvation.

The praise comes in the form of prayer as the golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints; the likening of prayers to incense comes from the Psalms, “Let my prayer be set before You as incense...” (Psalm 141:2); could those prayers be for those who are being persecuted and martyred on earth as recorded in Revelation 6:9? “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You avenge the blood of those who dwell on the earth?” Does this imply that those in heaven know what is going on in the earth when the great Tribulation unfolds? How about today? When we get to heaven prayer as adoration and thanksgiving will still be a form of worship and communication with our heavenly Father.

2. The worthiness of the Lamb... “And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God, and we shall reign on earth” (5:9-10).

The new song has four stanzas to it:

- Concerning the price He paid for our salvation... “You were slain...”

- Concerning the purchase He made... “You have redeemed us to God by Your blood...”
Concerning the people who are saved... “out of every tribe and
tongue and people and nation...”

Concerning the positions of reigning on earth as kings and priests...
“and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign
on the earth”; when Christ returns to earth and sets up His Millennial
kingdom we will be His royal servants with positions of authority
over the nations that come out of the great Tribulation (Psalm 2:6-9;
Romans 8:16-17; Luke 19:11-27; Revelation 2:26-27); we will also be
a kingdom of priests with access to God not unlike our situation
today for Peter refers to the Church as “a chosen generation, a royal
priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Peter 2:9).

The response of all creation... “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many
angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of
them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying
with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches
and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!’ And every
creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in
the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory
and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!’”
Then the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ And the twenty-four elders fell down
and worshipped Him who lives forever and ever” (5:11-14).

When I was in Calcutta, India, I experienced the greatest worship experience of
my life; Calcutta is the most hopeless place I have ever been; you see a dead
body lying in the street as if no one cares; I looked out my hotel window and
there is a naked lady sitting on the curb; then a flock of goats are herded down
the street, I walk past a bull sitting on some straw in the middle of a main street;
then I observe a beggar with his legs cut off sitting in the middle of a busy
intersection put there by the local mafia which then takes whatever money he
gets; a trip down the Ganges River you will find floating human body parts where
dead bodies are tossed if the family cannot afford a $5.00 piece of wood on which
the deceased can be cremated; then I notice a horse head floating by the boat; it
is a dirty but sacred river to the natives who go there daily to bath.
You can go to a Hindu temple and watch hundreds of people line up to give some
fruit or flowers to one of their Hindu gods and then witness a ceremony where
there are two goats; these goats go through a ritual where one is saved, while the
other has its head cut off as the rest of its body goes flying through the air kicking and flailing.

Then Sunday comes and we went to a large Assembly of God Church; the building seated a couple of thousand and it was filled to capacity; the men were for the most part dressed in suits and ties and the ladies were all decked out in their Sunday best; then the service started and the crowd stood on their feet and began worship; hands were raised as they sang: “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and glory and power forever and ever.”

I could not sing as tears rolled down my cheeks; how could they sing such a song when all one had to do was step outside the building and see nothing but hopelessness? There is a lot we could learn from the faith of those believers in Calcutta; they can praise God when seemingly there is no reason to praise; yet they had a hope that Jesus died for them and heaven awaited their entrance into the presence of God!

As we look at the response of those in heaven they too offer praise to the Lamb:

1. As to the number involved in praise... The voice of many angels, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands and thousands, along with the four living creatures, the 24 elders and every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth; one thing for sure, there will be a lot of singing in heaven; and there is reason to sing as we see how John takes language from the OT; there could well be in John’s memory David’s great blessing and thanksgiving to God:

   “Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father forever and ever. Yours O LORD is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and earth is Yours; Your is the kingdom, O LORD, both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all” (1 Chronicles 29:10-12).

2. As to the nature of the response... In 5:12 you have the seven-fold praise of the Lamb, Jesus, and the length of that praise is “forever and ever” (5:13).

   • To Him belongs the power ... Paul called “Christ the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).
• To Him belongs the riches... “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

• To Him belongs the wisdom... Jesus Christ is “the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).

• To Him belongs the strength... Christ is strong and can disarm the powers of evil and overthrow Satan (Matthew 12:29; Luke 11:22).

• To Him belongs the honor... The day will come when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:11).

• To Him belongs the glory... As John said, “We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

• To Him belongs the blessing... As the four living creatures and the 24 elders sang: “For You are worthy...” (Revelation 5:9a);

Jesus possesses all that we have described and everyone of them He uses in the service of those for whom He lived and died to live again; He does not clutch His possessions to Himself; He pours them out to all who believe in Him; therefore, there rises to Him from all the redeemed the blessing and the thanksgiving for all He has done; and that blessing and thanksgiving are the one gift that we who have nothing can give to Him who possesses all things! Amen!