

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Revelation		Pastor/Teacher
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THE LAMB

Today we hear a lot about emotional distress as it relates to lawsuits. Suing for emotional distress implies mental suffering or anguish induced by an incident that involves some kind of physical harm. But there is also psychological trauma that is often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds a person's ability to cope or integrate one's emotions involved with that experience. This kind of emotional trauma is always the result of fear or terror. This is seen in Revelation 5:4, where the Apostle John is overwhelmed with sorrow.¹ "Chapter 5 constitutes the fulcrum or pivot of the Book of Revelation. It is also one of the most dramatic parts of this book. It tells us that the God of creation is also the God of redemption. God is accomplishing His redemptive love plan through the Lamb of God who is also the Lion of God."²

- I. **JOHN'S CONSTERNATION: A SEALED SCROLL.** "John's attention is now drawn to the right hand of the enthroned One, on which lies a *book* – not a codex with its pages found along a spine but a scroll written on front and back, rolled and sealed along its outside edge (Rev. 5:1). The scroll is written *on front and back*, like that shown to Ezekiel when he was called as a prophet (Ezek. 2:9-3:3). Because Ezekiel's scroll symbolized the message that he was to deliver to God's people, he was commanded to eat the scroll in preparation for his proclamation. There is, however, one great obstacle to John's preaching the contents of the scroll he now sees in God's right hand: the scroll John sees is sealed. In the ancient world documents were sealed with wax impressed with the author's insignia as a token of authenticity (Jer. 32:10-11; 1 Cor. 9:2; cf. John 3:33) but also for security and privacy (Dan. 12:4, 9; Rev. 10:4). A sealed scroll could not be read until the seals were broken (Isa. 29:11); but since the seal symbolized its owner's authority, it could not legitimately be broken without his authorization. Herein lies the problem that wrings lament from John's heavy heart."³

- II. **THE QUESTION: WHO IS WORTHY?** In 5:2 we are introduced to a "strong angel" (ESV, *aggelon ischuron*). "The term *strong* occurs seven times in the Apocalypse as an adjective and two times as a noun. When it is a noun, it is always in the plural and indicates a category of human beings destined to meet a nasty end (6:15; 19:18). As an adjective it is used three times to describe an angel (here; 10:1; 18:21) and once each to describe a voice (18:2), the city of Babylon (18:10), the thunder (19:6), and the Lord God (18:8). Thus in the majority of cases the word is used to refer to angelic or angelomorphic figures rather than to humans. We might ask whether *strong*, like *great*, refers not so much to the unusual muscularity of the angel (only 18:21 seems to suggest that) as to its spiritual force, or at least to its superhuman greatness."⁴ "The *mighty angel* was not one of the living creatures or one of the elders. This is surely the same figure described in detail in Revelation 10:1 and mentioned in 18:21 (the other two references to a *mighty* angel in Revelation). This may even be

Gabriel (Luke 1:19), but we do not know for sure. John is more interested in the question he heard the *angel proclaiming in a loud voice*. Quite a search is implied in that *no one* was found *worthy to break the seals and open the scroll*. Those *in heaven or on earth or under the earth* is not meant as an exact definition of the location of all intelligent life. Some take this phrase in the sense of *angels, humans, and demons*. Other scholars have seen a reference to *the blessed dead, those still alive, and those who are damned*. No created being was *worthy* (morally deserving of the privilege of unleashing the judgments of God on his sinful universe).”⁵

III. ***THE LAMB IS WORTHY!*** “Someone *is* worthy to open the scroll! All is not lost. The sword in the stone will be dislodged. Having learned this, though, our sense of relief must not cause us to miss some of the vital detail of what is going on right before our eyes. What we are looking at here contains one of the keys to solving the entire riddle of John’s vision. Notice the ways in which Christ is described in this verse: first as *the Lion of the tribe of Judah*, then as *the Root of David*. Both these titles evoke long-standing messianic hopes. Both get at the essence of what the people of God expected in a savior. He would be like a lion rising to devour its prey, and he would reinvigorate the long defunct royal line of David, ancient Israel’s greatest son. By using these titles for Jesus, the elder declares that he is indeed the long-awaited Messiah. However, Revelation does not leave it at that. Rather, John’s next experience results in a radical reinterpretation of these expectations, turning them upside down. The celestial elder tells John that someone has been found worthy to open the scroll. That is what John *hears*. But when John looks, what he actually *sees* is *a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered* (5:6). John would have expected to see a royal military figure ready for battle. What he actually saw must have been deeply perplexing – a vision of weakness rather than of strength. The figure of a slaughtered lamb takes us back to the first Passover, when a lamb was butchered in each household to rescue the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The lamb’s blood, smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the houses of the Israelites, protected them from the angel of death as it passed through the land, killing the firstborn son of every family (Ex. 12:21-23). In later times the slaughtered lamb came to be thought of as a kind of ransom that had been paid for the people’s release from slavery to an overwhelming power (for example, Deut. 7:8; 13:5). And this is the way the first followers of Jesus came to think of his death on the cross. He had become the ransom paid to rescue God’s people from the evil kingdom. His death on the cross, followed by his resurrection from the dead, proved that he was God’s anointed one, the Messiah, the true heir. That is why he is worthy to open the scroll. Revelation puts it this way: *You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth* (5:9-10). The last part of that passage echoes the words spoken by God to the Israelites when they eventually arrived at Mount Sinai after escaping from Egypt: *Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation* (Ex. 19:5-6). Jesus’ death is the event that brings us to God and makes it possible for us to belong to God as a treasured possession.”⁶

CONCLUSION: The late James Boice in the last series of sermons that he preached said: “Christ is called a lamb twenty-eight times in Revelation. It is John’s favorite name for Jesus – and it also occurs, not surprisingly, in John’s gospel. In fact, his gospel contains perhaps the most important reference to Jesus as a lamb, for it is there that John the Baptist points him out as *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29). . . . The climax of this section comes in verse 7 when the Lamb approaches the throne and takes the scroll from the hand of God Almighty. At this point, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders from chapter 4 respond by falling down before the Lamb,

just as they had previously done before the throne of the Father, and by worshiping him in prayer and singing the hymns that we will examine in our next study. Daniel 7:13-14 is the only Old Testament passage in which a divine individual is described as approaching the throne of God to receive authority. The text says, *Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.* That son of man was Jesus, of course; and what Daniel saw was the same thing John was allowed to see from Patmos. John's Lamb is the Lord of glory. Why not bow before him as he unrolls the scroll that reveals the outworking of the perfect purposes of God in human history?"⁷

ENDNOTES

¹The Greek text reads *egō eklaion polu*, literally "I kept on weeping without stopping." A very picturesque and descriptive expression. See A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament* VI (Broadman Press, 1933), p. 333.

²J. P. Newport, *The Lion and The Lamb* (Broadman Press, 1986), p. 174.

³D. E. Johnson, *Triumph of The Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (P&R, 2001), p. 103.

⁴E. F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on The Apocalypse of John* (Eerdmans, 1999), p. 138.

⁵K. H. Easley, *Revelation: A New Testament Commentary* XII (Holman, 1999), p. 91.

⁶P. Spilsbury, *The Throne, The Lamb & The Dragon: A Reader's Guide To The Book of Revelation* (IVP, 2002), p. 68-69.

⁷J. M. Boice, *Seven Churches, Four Horsemen, One Lord: Lessons from The Apocalypse* (P&R, 2020), p. 181, 186.