

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

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WORTHY IS THE LAMB

The name *Redeemer*, wrote B. B. Warfield, is one charged with deep emotion and as such is to be particularly in the language of devotion: “There is no one of the titles of Christ which is more precious to Christian hearts than *Redeemer*. There are others, it is true, which are more often on the lips of Christians. The acknowledgement of our submission to Christ as our Lord, the recognition of what we owe to Him as our Saviour – these things, naturally, are most frequently expressed in the names we call Him by. *Redeemer*, however, is a title of more intimate revelation than either *Lord* or *Saviour*. It gives expression not merely to our sense that we have received salvation from Him, but also to our appreciation of what it cost Him to procure this salvation for us. It is the name specifically of the Christ of the cross. Whenever we pronounce it, the cross is placarded before our eyes, and our hearts are filled with loving remembrance not only that Christ has given us salvation, but that He paid a mighty price for it.”¹

- I. ***THE LAMB AND THE SCROLL.*** John, in looking at the throne, now focuses his attention on what is in the right hand of the one who sits upon the throne! A scroll. What is it? Why is it sealed? “If the scroll stays sealed, the consequences are even more serious than the confusion of the churches. The opening of the scroll would be not only an act of revelatory disclosure but also an act of executive authority, carrying its edicts into action. The things written in the scroll *must take place* because they constitute God’s plan for history, culminating in the vindication of his servants and the unchallenged establishment of his dominion on earth, as it is in heaven. The strong angel’s question is not merely Who is worthy to reveal God’s plan? but also Who is worthy to carry out God’s plan? Who deserves to receive from the Father’s hand all authority in heaven and earth, to make the kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (11:15)?”² The following chapters reveal that when the seals are broken and the scroll is unrolled a series of events will reveal a number of momentous events occurring on earth. In Revelation 10:7, the scroll is identified as the mystery of God (ESV). Ladd helpfully explains the significance of this expression. “*Mystery* is an important biblical word whose primary meaning is not something secret or mysterious but a divine purpose revealed to men. It is used this way in the Greek translation of Daniel 2:29-30, where it designates the eschatological purpose of God revealed first to the king and then to Daniel. In the Qumran literature, we read that, to the Teacher of Righteousness, the leader of the sect, *God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants, the prophets* (Commentary on Habukkak 7:4-5). That is, God has revealed to the Teacher his divine purpose hidden in the prophetic writings. The classic passage in the New Testament is Rom. 16:25-26, where *mystery* clearly refers to God’s redemptive plan, at first hidden in the mind of God, but then revealed and made public to all who will listen to the prophetic word. This is the meaning in the present passage. The

mystery of God is his total redemptive purpose, which includes the judgment of evil and the eschatological salvation of his people.”³

II. **THE QUALIFICATIONS DESCRIBED OF CHRIST.** Only one who is worthy can open the scroll. “One must assume,” writes Aune, “that the one holding the scroll has the right and the ability to open it and read it, but it is equally obvious that in this context this is abrogated. The term *axios – worthy* -- does not simply mean *able* (i.e., the opposite of *oudeis edunata -- no one was able* in v. 3), but it means rather *qualified* in the sense of having the proper qualifications to perform this special task. The purpose for opening the scroll is not so that it can be read (nothing is said anywhere in Revelation about the *contents* of the scroll) but so that the eschatological events can begin to take place.”⁴ The titles “Lion of the tribe of Judah” and “the root of David” are both Messianic. “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.”⁵ “As John looked to see the mighty Lion (the conquering warrior-Messiah from the Root of David), he saw instead the striking figure of a *Lamb (arnion – a young sheep)* as if it had been slaughtered, standing in the center of the throne court. This new figure portrays sacrificial death and links the Messiah to the OT Passover lamb (Exod. 12:5f; Isa. 53:7; John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19). Here John joins the OT royal Davidic Messiah with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (Isa. 42-53). Both prophetic themes come together in Jesus of Nazareth, the true Messiah. *As if it had been slain (esphagmenon – with its throat cut)* could refer to the *marks of death* the living Lamb still bore or to his appearance *as if being led to the slaughter*, i.e., *marked out for death* (Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, in loc.). The *lamb* metaphor dominates John’s thought in the rest of the book (e.g., 6:1ff; 7:9ff; 12:11; 13:8; 21:9). John notices that the Lamb who bears the marks of death is also the ruler who bears the signs of the fullness of divine omnipotence, dominion, and omniscience (*seven horns and seven eyes*).”⁶

III. **HEAVEN’S CHOIR RESPONDS.** Richard Gamble, another of my former teachers, writes: “Revelation 5:9 says, *And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.* Revelation 14:3 adds, *And they sang a new song.* The first *new song* (Rev. 5:9) is sung to the victorious Christ. His obedience has given him the right to open the scroll. He is *worthy* because he was slain. Through his death, he redeemed men and women from all over the earth with his blood. In the Old Testament, it was through the blood of bulls oxen, lambs, goats, and birds that redemption was obtained. In the Old Testament, in general, all kingdoms are God’s kingdom. More specifically, the prophet Jeremiah was sensitive both to the role that the different nations would play and to the importance of the scroll. God’s reign on the earth is also an important theme in the Psalms, for example in Psalm 45:6 and Psalm 68:16. After addressing Christ, and joyfully recounting his redemptive work, the voices of the heavenly assembly declare the state of those redeemed: *You have made them [the purchased from all the nations] to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth* (Rev. 5:10). This statement about the heavenly host is a tremendous fulfillment of God’s prophetic word. It fulfills Jeremiah’s ancient prophecy, it fulfills as well the Law, and even fulfills the creation plan first made with Adam! Yet the statement does more than announce the completion of prophecy. It describes the heavenly servants’ activity. They serve the Lord as priests. In the Old

Testament, the priests served God in the temple, as mentioned for example in Psalm 132:7-10. The description of the heavenly scene continues in Revelation 5:11, *then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.* This vision of heaven was seen by the psalmist, too, as may be seen in Psalm 148:2. A second stanza of the new song begins at Revelation 5:12, *In a loud voice they sang: **Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!*** Revelation 5:12-13 is similar to David's prayer of praise before the assembly in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19. Certainly King David knew about God's great strength, and he sang about it in Psalm 21:1-5, 13. The psalmist, in Psalm 63:2, has apparently seen the same heavenly vision as John. A *new song* is also mentioned in Revelation 14:3. However, the contents of this song are not given, because the singers are special. While no phrases from that song are given, the Old Testament gives us quite a bit of content that perhaps informed the singers."⁷

CONCLUSION: H. P. Liddon, in his masterful book on the person of Christ, describes the scene: "*I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as It had been slain.* Around Him are three concentric circles of adoration. The inmost proceeds from the four mysterious creatures and the four and twenty elders who *have harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints.* These are the courtiers who are placed on the very steps of the throne; they represent more distant worshippers. But they too fall down before the throne, and sing the new song which is addressed to the Lamb slain and glorified; *Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth.* Around these, at a greater distance from the Most Holy, there is a countless company of worshippers: *I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the 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 honour, and glory, and blessing.* Beyond these again, the entranced Apostle discerns a third sphere in which a perpetual worship is maintained. Lying outside the two inner circles of conscious adoration offered by the heavenly intelligences, there is in St. John's vision an assemblage of all created life, which, whether it wills or not, lives for Christ's as for the Father's glory: *And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.* This is the hymn of the whole visible creation, and to it a response comes from the inmost circle of adoring beings, ratifying and harmonizing this sublime movement of universal life: *And the four creatures said, Amen.* And how does the redeemed Church on earth bear her part in the universal chorus of praise? *Unto Him That loved us, and washed us from our sins in His Own Blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* It is surely impossible to mistake the force and meaning of this representation of the adoration of the Lamb in the Apocalypse."⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ *The Works of B. B. Warfield II* (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 375.

² D. E. Johnson, *Triumph of The Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (P&R, 2002), p. 105.

³ G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1972), p. 145.

⁴ D. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation I* (Word, 1997), p. 347.

⁵ P. Spilsbury, *The Throne, The Lamb & The Dragon: A Reader's Guide To The Book of Revelation* (IVP, 2002), p. 468.

⁶ A. F. Johnson, *Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary XII* (Zondervan, 1981), p. 468.

⁷ R. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God I* (P&R, 2009), pp. 557-59.

⁸ H. P. Liddon, *The Divinity of Our Lord* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 382.