

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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

<b>Series:</b>	<b>Worship Series</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>4</b>		Mason Depew
<b>Text:</b>	<b>Revelation 5</b>		
<b>Date:</b>	<b>July 20, 2025 (a.m.)</b>		

### The Song of God's People

Christianity has always been a singing religion. It's such a common feature of Christian worship that we can easily take it for granted and not give it much thought. But we ought to give thought to how, what, and why we are singing when we come to public worship. In some ways, this is more necessary than ever, because singing in groups has faded from our lives. As music has become more and more industrialized and digitized, and as so many other forms of entertainment now compete for our attention, fewer and fewer people sing with others in social settings.<sup>1</sup> As Martin Luther said, however, "The good news of Christ's great deliverance tunes the heart to sing." For Christians, there is no more appropriate response to the proclamation of the Word of God than to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of thanksgiving. As we do this, we get a foretaste of the heavenly worship we will enjoy when our race is won. Revelation 5 is a perfect picture of this heavenly worship that is in our future.

1. Verses 1-7 | John has a vision of a scroll that no one is worthy to open, until the lamb appears. Like with any prophetic vision, it is important to carefully examine the imagery for symbolism, and to compare it with other passages of Scripture.<sup>2</sup>
  - a. The scroll is written on both sides and sealed with seven seals.<sup>3</sup> Together, these features represent the fact that it is complete.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that this scroll is meant to be the same

---

<sup>1</sup> "Adults in America don't sing communally. Children routinely sing together in their schools and activities, and even infants have sing-alongs galore to attend. But past the age of majority, at grown-up commemorations, celebrations, and gatherings, this most essential human yawp of feeling—of marking, with a grace note, that we are together in this place at this time—usually goes missing.

The reasons why are legion. We are insecure about our voices. We don't know the words. We resent being forced into an activity together. We feel uncool. And since we're out of practice as a society, the person who dares to begin a song risks having no one join her.

This is a loss." - Karen Loew, "How Communal Singing Disappeared from American Life," in *The Atlantic*, March 28th, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> In Numbers 12:6, God rebukes Aaron and Miriam for attacking the authority of Moses. Here he mentions the fact that unlike with Moses, he typically speaks to a prophet "in a vision; I speak with him in a dream." With Moses, on the other hand, the Lord speaks "mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD." This implies that with any other prophets besides Moses (and Christ, who is the greater Moses), we should expect that their words will be hard to interpret.

<sup>3</sup> Some commentators suggest that this scroll may in fact be a codex, like the books we use today. The problem with this view, it seems to me, is that John sees writing on both sides of the paper *when it is still sealed*. That makes much more sense with a scroll, where you can see the outside of the paper even when it is rolled up, than with a codex, where you cannot see through the binding. The parallel with Ezekiel 2:9-10 makes this even more likely, since codices were certainly not common in Ezekiel's day.

<sup>4</sup> "Paper back then was manufactured by cutting or splitting papyrus reed into strips and laying two layers of these strips together into a perpendicular or weave pattern and pressing them together. The side of papyrus paper where the fiber strips ran horizontally (the "recto") was easy to write upon because the fibers formed subtle horizontal lines. However, the flip side where the fibers ran vertically (the "verso") was normally left blank and constituted the outside of the scroll, with the result that most 'books' in John's time were scrolls with writing on only one side.

So the significance of John seeing a scroll 'written within and on the back' (Rev 5:1) is that it is filled up full. The scroll is written on every possible writing surface and is tantamount to saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:15). The book is also sealed with *seven* seals where one wax seal would close up a scroll quite nicely. It is fully complete both in its text and in its seals." - Steven M. Baugh, *The Majesty on High*, 35.

one in which the visions of several Old Testament prophets were “sealed up.”<sup>5</sup> The idea is that all the prophecies of the past are waiting to be fulfilled by one figure.

- b. There is no one in all of creation who is worthy to open this scroll, and John is so distressed that he begins to weep. When you think of how the Bible often portrays even its most important human characters with deep flaws, you should think of this part of John’s vision. The point is that Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, and so many more *were not worthy* to be the ultimate savior of God’s people. They were not worthy to fulfill all the prophecies of the ages in themselves.<sup>6</sup> No one in all of creation is, so the situation looks completely hopeless, as if God’s promises in those prophecies may actually fail.
- c. But one of the elders then interrupts John’s despair by pointing him to a new figure in the vision: “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered.”<sup>7</sup> But what does John see when he looks? Not a lion, but a lamb. Not one who has slain many, but one who has *been slain*. This is a clear fulfillment both of the Passover and of Isaiah 53:7.<sup>8</sup>
- d. The seven horns of the lamb symbolize power. Horns can also represent honor in the Bible, but that is when they are “lifted up,”<sup>9</sup> which does not happen here. Therefore the other meaning, that of power, and especially power *unto salvation*, fits much better here.<sup>10</sup>
- e. The seven eyes symbolize that the lamb sees everything. They are also connected to the seven churches of Asia Minor, to which Revelation is written, implying that Christ sees everything they suffer for his name’s sake.<sup>11</sup>
- f. Some have tried to argue that the seven spirits before the throne are angels, and the ESV seems to be taking this view by leaving “spirits” uncapitalized. The great problem with

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, near the end of Daniel’s visions (and near the end of his life, too), the angel tells him, “shut up the words and **seal** the book, until the time of the end. ... Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and **sealed** until the time of the end” (Daniel 12:4, 9). Isaiah also speaks of his vision as a sealed book in Isaiah 29:11: “And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, ‘Read this,’ he says, ‘I cannot, for it is sealed.’”

<sup>6</sup> “The portrayal of the angelic questioner in 5:2 (“I saw a strong angel proclaiming in a great voice”) contains faint outlines of the angelic spokesman in Dan. 4:13–14, 23 (cf. Dan. 4:23 [LXX]: “he saw that an angel was sent in strength from the Lord”; 4:13–14 [LXX]: “behold, an angel was sent in strength from heaven and he cried out”; 4:13–14[10] [Theod.]: “a holy one came down from heaven and cried out in strength”).

Not only are the descriptions of the two angels verbally alike, but they also have **the same kind of role**: the Danielic angel is the spokesman for the heavenly council and proclaims a decree of judgment followed by restoration with respect to Nebuchadnezzar; the angel in Revelation 5 is also the spokesman for the heavenly council and proclaims a divine decree of judgment and redemption with respect to the cosmos. The implication of both proclamations in their contexts is that no created being, only God, possesses the worthiness and authority to be sovereign over history and to be able to execute his cosmic plan.” - G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 338.

<sup>7</sup> This is undoubtedly a reference to the fulfillment of Jacob’s final blessing and prophecy toward Judah: “Judah is a lion’s cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” - Genesis 49:9-10. This prophetic theme is picked up in the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, which the elder is also referencing when he mentions the Root of David.

<sup>8</sup> “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

<sup>9</sup> For example, Psalm 75:4-5 says, “I say to the boastful, ‘Do not boast,’ and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up your horn;’” In other words, to honor yourself is to boast. Also see Psalm 112:9, which explicitly says, “his horn is exalted in honor.”

<sup>10</sup> For example, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and **the horn of my salvation**, my stronghold.” - Psalm 18:2

<sup>11</sup> “The Lamb’s seven eyes show his omniscience as well as the mode of his presence with his embattled churches, for these eyes, like the seven lamps before God’s throne, symbolize ‘the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth’ (Rev 5:6). The prophet Zechariah was shown in vision a lampstand with seven lamps, like that in the tabernacle (Zech 4:2; Exod 25:37). These lamps were also interpreted as ‘the eyes of the LORD, which range to and fro throughout the earth’ (Zech 4:10). Thus the flexibility of John’s symbolism, with two images, lamps and eyes, pointing to one referent, God’s Spirit, has prophetic precedent. The Lamb has all power and all knowledge, extending to earth’s farthest corner. In omniscience he can say to each church, ‘I know.’” - Dennis Johnson, *The Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*, 107.

this view, however, is that John gives an apostolic greeting at the beginning of Revelation, *in the name of the seven spirits, in between the Father and the Son!* It is very difficult to believe this wasn't meant as a Trinitarian blessing, and there is nowhere else in Scripture where the people of God are blessed in the name of angels.<sup>12</sup> The point of referring to the seven spirits here, then, is to say that the Spirit which dwells specifically in each true church, is the same Spirit who anoints and perfects the work of the Lamb. He is Christ's "eyes and ears," as it were, on earth and applies the redemption purchased by him to his people.

2. Verses 8-14 | After the Lamb takes the scroll from the hand of him who sits on the throne, the creatures and the elders worship the Lamb with a new song.
  - a. The four living creatures from chapter 4 are here to represent the main divisions of God's original creation. The lion represents wild land animals, the ox domesticated land animals, the eagle birds of the sky, and man the human realm, of course. The reason there are four of them is likely because the four compass directions or four winds represent the whole earth.<sup>13</sup> The reason there is no sea creature is likely because the sea represents the devil's realm of chaos and rebellion throughout much of Revelation.<sup>14</sup>
  - b. The elders represent God's people: twelve for the tribes of Israel and twelve for the apostles add up to twenty-four.<sup>15</sup> This makes an important point about the fact that God's people were governed and represented by elders in both the Old and New Covenants. But here in Revelation 5, the main point is that they represent all of God's people old and new giving thanks for what Christ has accomplished for them.
  - c. This song in three parts focuses on redemption, whereas the previous song in chapter 4 had focused on creation.<sup>16</sup> Thus it is appropriate to call it a "new song," because it is focusing on the work that Jesus Christ has only just recently accomplished, in his atoning death.
    - i. It is amazing to juxtapose the contents of this song in verse 9 with the announcement of the Lamb in verse 5. How did the Lion of the tribe of Judah conquer, making himself worthy to open the scroll? By being slain, and pouring out his blood to ransom some from every tribe, language, people, and nation. He conquered and established his kingdom *by being slaughtered*.
    - ii. By doing this, the song says in verse 10 that the Lamb has actually forged this disparate people into a kingdom and priests for our God.<sup>17</sup> Once they were not a

<sup>12</sup> "The most compelling evidence for the identity of the seven-fold Spirit symbol in Revelation is the opening, trinitarian benediction in Rev 1:4. The seven Spirits of God must be a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit in this benediction, for wherever else in Scripture are God's people blessed in the name of one or more angels?! (cf. Rev 19:10; 22:9). The seven Spirits of God in Rev 5:6 represent the anointing of the incarnate Son of God with the Holy Spirit such that the risen Christ Jesus has authority, power, and presence through the Spirit over 'all the earth' (cf. Rev 3:1)." - Baugh, 38.

<sup>13</sup> Baugh, 22. For more examples of the number four associated with the whole earth, see Revelation 7:1; Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 49:36; Ezekiel 37:9; Daniel 7:2; 8:8; 11:4; Zech 2:6; 6:5; Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27

<sup>14</sup> See especially Revelation 13, where the beast representing all the tyrannical empires of Daniel 7 rises out of the sea at the dragon's command.

<sup>15</sup> Compare with the references to the two groups of twelve combined in different ways in Revelation 21:12, 14, and 21.

<sup>16</sup> "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for **you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.**" - Revelation 4:11. The word "receive" here is the same as the word "take" in 5:9, suggesting an even closer parallel.

<sup>17</sup> "It is obvious that the people of God do not reign *on* the earth now, because the kingdom which Christ inaugurated is not of *this* world (e.g., John 18:36). However, Christ himself does rule *over* this earth as we have seen with the seven horns and the seven eyes in Rev 5:6. The solution here in Rev 5:10 is that the phrase "they reign *on* the earth" should be rendered "*over* the earth" which is an established meaning for this construction in many places both in extra-biblical and biblical Greek (e.g. 1 Sam 8:7; 12:14; 2 Sam 3:17; 2 Kgs 11:3; cf. Rev 2:26; 17:18; 20:6). So we render Rev 5:10 as '[A]nd you have made them to be a kingdom and priests for our God, and they reign over the earth.' We see individual Christians entering into this rule in Rev 20:4-6, which, ironically, is when they 'come alive' *at*

nation, but now they are. They are his nation, ransomed by his blood for the service of their Creator and Savior.

- iii. It is very important to pay attention to the logic of their worship here, because there are some, primarily Eastern Orthodox, who want to argue that Christ did not pay the penalty for our sins on the Cross. They emphasize instead that Christ conquered death for us by dying and rising from the dead. This is true of course, but *how did he accomplish that victory?* When we look at the imagery of Revelation 5 here, it becomes clear that he conquered death by taking it upon himself as the penalty we deserved, just as the passover lamb received death in the place of all the Hebrew families leaving Egypt.

- d. In verses 11 and 13, John looks around and sees an even greater choir, first of innumerable angels, and then of every single creature in heaven and on earth. This continues to magnify the glory of this King and his kingdom, of course, but their message continues to be essentially the same: the Lamb is worthy. A final, glorious, and resounding “Amen!” concludes all the singing of this chapter, as well as chapter 4, which belong together.

- 3. This leads us to several important points of application for our singing in public worship.

- a. Most of all, singing together shows our unity in a way that other acts of worship do not quite accomplish. When we sing the same words to the same tune with all our different voices, we show we are different members of one body.<sup>18</sup> Think of how magnificent it is that all those creatures, combined with the elders and the angels, united their voices together in singing the praise of the Lamb of God!

- i. Of course, this means we cannot all sing our favorite songs as often as we would like, and will have to learn new songs from time to time. This burden will not be too terrible if we remember that we are not here to serve ourselves, but show love to one another and ultimately to the Lord.

- ii. Singing older songs unites us with Christians of past generations. This point is often made about singing traditional hymns (and it’s true), but how much more true is it of the psalms! When we sing hymns, we are standing with many Christians over the course of hundreds of years, but when we sing psalms we are standing with countless believers going back *over 3,000 years* to David and even Moses!

- b. We must take great care about the content of the songs we sing. It is not enough for them to be mostly true or vaguely true. They must adhere extremely close to the content of the Scriptures if we are going to use them in public worship. The singers in Revelation 5 only sing what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture, that Jesus Christ accomplished his mission when he purchased us with his blood, shed on the Cross for our sins, and rose from the dead to sit down at his Father’s hand in kingly majesty.

- i. First of all, remember we are standing before the holy God, our Creator and Savior when we sing. Even though yes, of course these kinds of sins would be covered by the blood of Christ, it would still be wildly inappropriate for us to say anything false or speculative about him to his face. Think of how you feel when you receive a gift

---

*death* and so ‘come to rule’ for one thousand years over the earth with Christ in heaven. ‘Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?’ (1 Cor 6:2).”

<sup>18</sup> In Ephesians 5:19-21, Paul tells Christians that being filled with the Spirit means “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Notice we are supposed to *address one another* with our singing and *submit to one another*, even as we are, of course, singing to the Lord.

- you never asked for and did not want, and which shows the person really does not know you very well, and then think of how much more humiliating it would be to do that to *your Lord and Savior*.
- ii. Secondly, we must not give anyone in our congregation cause for stumbling if we can avoid it. Pressuring believers to sing a song that has doubtful lines or phrases in it would be a serious disservice to them. At best, they have to tune out and pause worshiping for a moment, or at worst, they are confused and misled.
  - iii. This is another good reason to sing the psalms. As long as it is a good translation, there is no danger of singing anything false about the Lord, since he put these words in his people's mouths himself. The only challenge is to be sure we understand them, so we mean it when we sing them. But this is, really, another benefit because we ought to be studying and growing in our understanding of this critical book of the Bible anyway, so again, the challenge is good for us.
- c. One other great reason we need to sing is that, yes, it shows real *emotion*. As Reformed Christians, we often emphasize that feeling is not central to our lives and should not replace wisdom and careful reflection on the things of God. That is certainly true, but we are also made as creatures with feelings, and need to employ them in the worship of God if we are to really love him with all our being. Music, which is perhaps the most universal human way to convey powerful feelings, is obviously appropriate for representing this aspect of our love for God.
- i. After all, one of the most common kinds of songs in every era is the love song, and Song of Solomon (sometimes even called the Song of Songs) is just that: a love song! It seems that nearly every culture in every age has recognized that the love between a man and a woman is so beautiful it cannot be captured with ordinary prose. It cries out to be expressed in poetry, and set to music.
  - ii. Therefore, considering what a great redemption we have received, what great love with which we have been loved, one of the most appropriate things we can do is sing. The Gospel communicates to us a love that is infinitely greater than any human love, so it is infinitely more worthy of being repeatedly retold in song. So long as we are careful to ensure that the *content* of what we are singing is correct and substantial, by all means sing out with all the sincere feeling you can muster. As the last verse of Jesus Paid It All says, "And when before the throne, I stand in him complete, 'Jesus died my soul to save,' my lips shall still repeat." This is our hope, what we long to do throughout our everlasting lives in the New Creation, and Jesus Christ will surely bring it about.