

THE WORTHY LAMB

Revelation 5:1-14

Every four years our nation goes through an election cycle for the purpose of choosing a person to be President of the United States. As we survey the candidates and what we know of their qualifications, we sometimes find ourselves asking, “Is there anyone out there who is capable, who has the right values’ foundation, and whom we can trust to do this job?” These three fundamental criteria may be tests or standards we should be applying to determine who should be elected.

Several years ago the methodology for questioning prospective employees underwent a shift in emphasis from “woulda, coulda, shoulda” to “what did you actually do in a specific situation that you experienced?” Many of us know what we should do and what we could do in various situations, but one of the best ways to know what we would do is to check how we have behaved in the past. While past behavior is not a guarantee of future behavior, it is a good indicator.

There was a recent post on Facebook that said “Trusting in the Lord means that everything you do is done with Him in mind.” As it is with so many things that “sound good,” that statement is very misleading. The Pharisees in Jesus’ day had God “in mind” in all their rituals, yet they missed the mark of what God had intended because they operated by the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law. Most criminals have the police in mind as they try to avoid getting caught as they go about their criminal activities. We might encounter someone who is a constitutional law professor and uses his or her knowledge of the law to avoid doing the intent of the law.

What is needed is someone who knows and does not only the letter of the law but also the intent of the law and goes beyond the minimal expectation to the point of excellence in what they do. Where do we find a person like that? As important as it seems to find a person who is able to lead our nation, it is infinitely more important that we find someone who is able to carry out God’s will (plan and purpose) for all of humanity for all of eternity. We certainly need to go beyond “woulda, coulda, shoulda” and find someone who is qualified in every sense of the word.

The Search – 5:1-4

¹I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. ²And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” ³And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. ⁴Then I *began* to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; Revelation 5:1-4 (NASB95)

You’ve often heard it said that God has a plan for your life. He also has a plan for the history and destiny of the world. The book (scroll) that John saw should assure us that God has planned out what will happen. The fact that it was sealed up indicates that what will happen is (or was) not readily known and is (or was) not generally available to people. The fact that it was recorded and sealed would give us an indication that “what was written” was likely related to those things that “must” take place in the future from the time it was revealed to John. The fact that the scroll was written on both sides is said to mean that nothing more could be added. What was written was complete and final.

The significance of the seven seals beyond the fact that seven is the number of completeness is said by some to be a symbolic presentation that showed that if the scroll were unrolled the seven seals would need to be broken one by one. It seems that the implication of

this idea is that after the first seal is broken that a portion of the contents would be revealed. Then after the second seal is broken that another portion would be revealed and so on until all had been opened. Other commentators have suggested that all seven of the seals must be broken before any of the contents of the scroll could be read. One commentator thought that the opening of the seals simply provided access to the content, but nothing of that content would be revealed until the visible setting up of the Kingdom of Christ otherwise referred to as the Millennial Reign of Christ on the earth. The opening of the seals would represent the successive steps of what had to happen to prepare the way for the actual reading of the content. How and when it is to be opened and revealed may be less important than the message itself.

So far we have not raised the question of what IS written on the scroll. In the Roman way of doing things, wills were witnessed by seven people and then each witness would apply his seal on the finished document. In general, a seal was placed on a document to authenticate the validity of the source of the information. A broken seal would indicate the possibility that someone might have altered the message. The seal could be legally opened by the one who had been granted the authority to do so. That authority was granted by the initiator of the message. When the will was to be executed or read, if it were possible, these witnesses would be there for the reading of the will. This scroll could be described as a contract deed or a testament or will. That could easily mean that the scroll in the hand of God represents his covenant promise of judgment and kingdom for humanity. We sometimes refer to this as God's plan of salvation.

If we assume that the writing on the scroll was God's plan of salvation for mankind, then it would be reasonable to ask "who or what were the witnesses of this plan?" If we think about the accounts in the Scriptures and ask "what were the significant happenings in the Biblical accounts that provide a testimony (witness) of God's plan," then we could list several events.

We could start with the Creation and the account of the fall of mankind and the events of the ancient world leading up to the next significant event of the Flood and God's call of Noah. The next (or third) great happening could be God's call of Abram to be the father of a covenant people. The fourth major event that provided testimony of God's plan was the events associated with Egypt. God's people went there in hope of finding salvation during the time of famine and they found food to survive. They even flourished for a time; however, that world system led to their eventual enslavement and required an intervention by God to deliver them from that slavery. The fifth witness could be argued to be the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai and the subsequent wilderness experience. The sixth witness would be the conquest of the land of Canaan and the history of how God provided for them in spite of their unfaithfulness. The seventh witness might be the events of the Babylonian exiles and the return to their homeland. All these events have significant relationships to God's ultimate plan of salvation and many of the specific happenings during these epic times point to the Savior.

Since God has chosen to reveal this mystery that had been hidden throughout the ages, He had to find someone worthy to open the book. No man could be found that qualified or was able. Notice that the issue was "ability" rather than "authority." The Greek word translated as "able" is *dunamai* which refers to power. The idea of "worthy" is somewhat related to the English word "gravitas" which means "that which causes a sense of respect and trust." It is more directly related to the term "axiomatic" which is something that is accepted as true without controversy and that which commends itself as evidence.

If "ability" was the (additional) criterion rather than just being authorized, then it would appear that whoever was going to break the seals would also be expected to implement the plan or carry the wishes or requirements specified in the will. The search for such a person was

conducted in heaven, earth, and in hades. To answer the question of why no one was found who was able, then we have to have some idea of what was needed to implement the provision of the will. Can we discover the qualification of a Savior by examining the evidence of the witnesses that we find in the Old Testament Scriptures? Absolutely!

What was the condition of mankind in his fallen nature? He was enslaved and because of his status as a slave he could not redeem himself. If all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, then all who are of the seed of Adam would fail to qualify. Man could not save himself because of his sinfulness. John saw the hopelessness of the situation and he was grief stricken by it.

The Discovery – 5:5-7

⁵ and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.” ⁶ And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Revelation 5:5-7 (NASB95)

Are we aware of God’s plan of salvation and has anything happened to provide a clear message of the character of God and His plan for mankind? This answer has to be in the affirmative since that was the purpose of the earthly ministry of Jesus. He told Pilate that He was “born to testify unto the truth.” That testimony was given in His words and in His deeds.

John was told that he was going to be shown what would take place “after these things.” One could argue that the plan had not yet (when John saw the revelation) happened or been implemented. We could also argue that this opening or revelation of the plan provided the background information needed to put the future happenings in a proper context.

If a literal timing sequence is applied to the text, we would need to conclude that the seals could not be opened until the Lamb had been slain. It would good to know when the Lamb had been slain. Most people would say it was around A.D. 30. If we look further into the Revelation account and go to 13:8 we see that the Lamb had been slain from the foundation of the world.

No matter how bleak and hopeless a situation looks, we can trust God to have a way. Just as the elder said to John, “Weep not” we should be telling the world to not despair, because there is hope. This hope is centered in the same one that was (is) worthy to open the book. He is described as the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David. The lion was representative of royalty and sovereignty. It was prophesied by Jacob that the scepter would not depart from Judah and David was promised that his descendants would always be on the throne. It was generally accepted by the Jews that the Messiah was to come from the tribe of Judah and would be a direct descendant of David.

Instead of a Lion, there came forth a Lamb. This could be a representation of what happened in Judah during the first advent of Christ. The Jews were looking for a Lion and a Lamb showed up. John the Baptist looked up one day and told his followers. “Behold, the Lamb of God.” This “Lion-Lamb” symbolism points to the Sovereign One of the Universe that set aside His glory and came down to mankind to live among them in humility and then to suffer death for them. The God of Creation took on Himself the form of a Servant. By the way, Paul tells us to let this same attitude (mind) be in us.

When Christ was instructing His disciples about the qualifications for being “great” and being a “leader” (being first), he told them that to be “great,” one should be a servant and to be a “leader,” one should be a slave. The application to the Lion-Lamb picture is that to be recognized as a royal, sovereign leader, one must first become a suffering servant that gives up

his rights (becomes as a slave), even his right to life. This is exactly what Christ did and it was what enabled Him to be recognized as the One Who was Worthy to open the seals. The Lamb was able to take the book so that the seals could be opened and the contents could be revealed. He was also the One Who was able to implement the events that provided salvation for all who would believe.

The seven horns represent complete power (omnipotence) and the seven eyes represent complete knowledge (omniscience) which symbolically represent the Spirit of God that is throughout the earth.

Did this Lion of Judah (the Royal and Sovereign One) when He came forth as a Lamb (earthly ministry of Jesus) show any evidence that He was omnipotent and omniscient? In other words did Jesus, during His earthly ministry as a Lamb, give evidence that He had “horns and eyes?”

The demonstration of power during Christ’s ministry on the earth showed that He ruled over human frailties (disease, lameness, blindness, deafness); demons and evil spirits; physical world limitations (turned water into wine, walked on water, calmed the storms); and forgave sins. In addition He feed the multitudes, lay down His own life, and conquered death. There were also several demonstrated evidences of Jesus knowing or seeing beyond the obvious. He knew Nathanael and saw him under a fig tree, He perceived the malice of the Jewish leaders and knew what people were thinking, knew what Judas did in betraying Him, told Peter about his pending denial, knew that Lazarus had already died, amazed the Jewish scholar when He was twelve years old, and knew that He would be crucified and be resurrected.

The Honoring – 5:8-14

⁸ When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ “You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” ¹³ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” ¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped. Revelation 5:8-14 (NASB95)

The fact that the Lamb was able to take the book is evidence that God the Father (the One on the Throne) recognized His worthiness and ability to break open the seals and to implement the plan. That recognition was a signal for all around the throne to worship the Lamb which was what John saw in his vision.

The primary evidence of the worthiness of the Lamb mentioned by those giving praise was Christ’s act of redemption by giving Himself as the payment for our sins. This ultimate sacrifice was the dividing line in the history of mankind and the Word of God pointed to this in several places. In Genesis 22, a ram was substituted for Isaac, a picture of Christ giving His life for *the individual*. At the Passover, a lamb was slain for each *family*. In Isaiah 53:8 he stated that Jesus died for *the nation of Israel*. John (John 1:29) affirmed that the Lamb died for *the whole world!* We see confirmation of the universal nature of Christ salvation for those who believe in the words of those who were offering worship of the Lamb. Sinners were redeemed “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

We recognize those who are redeemed as the church. The church is a kingdom and priest

to our God and they will reign on the earth. Some Biblical scholars see this as a present reality in that, in Christ, we are reigning with Him even in the midst of persecution. Others see this as pointing to the time when the Millennial kingdom begins. Others find a middle ground that would tell us that the saints do spiritually reign now; but certainly not as they shall when Christ returns to initiate the visible kingdom.

The next thing we find is that those identified as being in the throne room were joined by a multitude of others including angels and every living thing in heaven, on earth, and under the earth in given praise and glory and honor unto God and to the Lamb.

The New Bible Commentary (D. A. Carson) notes that what John saw in this account was “a representation of the coronation of Jesus the Lord in terms of the ancient enthronement ceremonies of the Middle East. The steps of the ceremony are generally defined as exaltation (v 5), presentation (v6), enthronement (v7) and acclamation (vs 8-14).”

Maybe a good question for us is “when does or did Christ enter into His reign in power?” If the answer is that He reigns now and we are promised to reign with Him, then we (the church) should be acting like victors rather than victims.