

Who Is Worthy?  
Revelation 5:1-5  
1/18/2015

What are we worth? To some people that question will be returned with an answer in dollar signs. They're worth 3 million dollars, or some other figure. To other people, worth is defined in terms of how they look. For instance, as one study shows (written by Daniel Weiss), "13% of American women consider themselves pretty. 28% of American men think themselves handsome. 94% of American men would change something about their looks if they could. 99% of American women would change something about their looks if they could." For children, it almost always has to do with how the parents react to who they are, and what they do. As Jack Eicholz says, "Psychological studies establish that by age five a child has formed a fairly definite impression of himself. The same studies reveal that self-esteem is not closely related to social position, family work background, education or any combination of such factors. A young child sees himself from the reflections of those close to him, mainly his parents. How they react to his activities largely determines the self image he builds." So what is it? How do we measure our self-worth? By dollar signs, looks, relationships? The Bible has a very different answer. Our self-worth is determined by two relationships: our relationship to the first Adam, and our relationship to the second and last Adam. Our text today says that Jesus Christ is infinitely worthy. And if our lives are going to have ultimate and eternal worth, then we need to be related to Jesus Christ as a redeemed person. Jesus Christ is worthy. If we want worth for our lives, then we need to hitch a ride to heaven with Jesus.

The transition from chapter 4 to chapter 5 of Revelation is a subtle one. The main subject is still the same: worship of the one true God. The difference between the two chapters has to do with the reason for why we worship God. In chapter 4, the basic reason for worshipping God is His creative and sustaining power. In chapter 5 the reason for worship is redemption. Redemption of God's people has two aspects to it: what God does to redeem us; and what God does to remove and judge our enemies.

God's plan to redeem us and bring everything to a conclusion in righteous judgment is the content of the scroll mentioned in verse 1. It represents God's plan that we will see in the coming chapters. The seven seals of chapter 6 are the seals on this scroll. As many commentators have noticed, the scroll is not just about believers, and it is not just about unbelievers. God's glory will be revealed in salvation and judgment. Salvation and judgment of unbelievers are really mirror image to each other. Let's take a closer look at this scroll.

First of all, we see that the scroll is found in the right hand of the One seated on the throne. The right hand of God is the hand of power, and it is the hand

that carries out God's plan and purpose.

The scroll is written on both sides: front and back. There are several things that are important to know about this fact. Ancient scrolls were made out of either papyrus or leather. Papyrus is a plant that can be dried, and the fibers of the plant laid cross-wise to create a writing surface. That meant, however, that one side was much easier to write on than the other. If you write horizontally, you want to write on the side where the fibers are stretched horizontally. Almost all ancient papyrus scrolls are, therefore, only written on one side. A similar thing is true of leather scrolls. The inside part of the leather is automatically smooth. The outside, however, is the side where the hair is. It cost quite a lot of time and effort and money to scrape the hair off the one side to make it usable for writing. That makes this scroll in Revelation 5 different from the average scroll. There are two sources for the background of why this scroll is written on both sides, and both backgrounds can help us understand what is going on here. Firstly, Ezekiel is given a scroll in chapter 2 of his prophecy. That scroll also is written on the front and the back. It is said to be a scroll full of lamentation and woe. It is the scroll of judgment on the family of God for all their disobedience. From this Old Testament background, it seems quite obvious that judgment forms a large part of what this scroll in Revelation contains. The seals on this scroll that we see in chapter 6 confirm this beyond any doubt. However, there is another background to the doubly-written scroll that can help us here. Roman scrolls that relate to last wills and testaments were also written on both sides. The full content was on the "good" side, the side easiest to write on. The summary of the content was written on the "bad" side. Obviously, God's will and testament would be favorable to His people, especially at the end of all ages, the final judgment. So, from these two backgrounds, it seems plain that the scroll contains God's plan for His people, and God's plan for unbelievers.

Another vitally important thing we need to know about this scroll is that opening the seals and the scroll itself has two implications: firstly, that God's plan will become known (revealed) to people; secondly, that God's plan will actually be carried out. So, opening the scroll is a big deal. It is nothing less than the unveiling and the carrying out of God's great plan for the final judgment. If this opening of the seals and the scroll does not happen, then the following things would be true: 1. Jesus will not be worshiped, 2. the martyrs will not be avenged, 3. the prayers of the saints will not be answered, 4. the kingdom of the world would not become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; 5. the wicked would not be judged, 6. Jesus would not come back, and 7. God would not reign in glory in the new heavens and the new earth. All of these things hang on opening this scroll.

The person who is worthy to open this scroll has to have two things: He must have God's revelation in Himself, since He will be revealing God's great plan (therefore, He must have full knowledge of the plan itself); and 2. He must be able

to carry out God's great plan. He must know God's plan, and He must be able to do God's plan. Small wonder, then, that no mere human being, animal, or angel either in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth, was found who was worthy enough to open the seals and the scroll.

Given the vast eternal importance this scroll has, and the fact that no one was found immediately who could open this scroll, we can now understand why John started weeping in verse 4. God's plan was in jeopardy. It looked for a moment as though Satan would win!

It is at this point, when hope seemed at an end, that one of the elders told John that there was someone worthy enough to open the seals and the scroll. The elder gives this person two names: the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Root of David. The first name is an allusion to Genesis 49:9-10. The verses come in the context of Jacob blessing his twelve sons, and telling them what the futures of each tribe will bring. The verses say this: "Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stopped 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 Shiloh comes; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." Shiloh is a reference to the Messiah. The promise is that Judah shall always reign as the king of the tribes. Of course, that promise came to fulfillment in the line of David the king, who was from the tribe of Judah. God made a promise to David that David's throne would be eternal. The Root of David, therefore, is the promise made to David of that eternal king.

All of Scripture, therefore, points to one unavoidable fact: it is Jesus Christ who is this Lion of the tribe of Judah. It is Jesus Christ who is the Root of David. It is Jesus Christ who is worthy to open the seals and open the scroll. It is Jesus Christ who is worthy to make known God's great plan, and to bring it about.

Don't we want to see that great plan? Don't we want to see Jesus win? Don't we want to see Jesus conquer our great enemies so that they are no more, and so that they trouble us no more? The elder said to John that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Root of David, has conquered. It is no accident that these two titles are full of a kingly resonance. Kings conquer and rule over their enemies. Since Jesus is the King of Kings, He has conquered all His enemies.

The most amazing thing about this victory, however, is the way it came about. Look at verse 6. John sees a Lamb, looking as though it had been slain. That Lamb, looking as though it had been slain IS the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and IS the Root of David. Jesus conquers death by first giving way to death. It is as though a wrestler slides underneath his opponent, and the opponent, just as he thinks he has him down on the mat, finds out that he has been tricked into a hold from which there is no escape at all. For the only way Jesus could conquer death is to go underneath it, if you will. If it were simply a matter of power, then Jesus would not have needed to undergo death. But if Jesus was going to conquer death

*on our behalf*, then He would have to undergo death in our place. That is our Lion/Lamb, the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. Behold the most worthy Opener of Seals and Opener of the Scroll!

How, therefore, can we be worthy to see this plan unfurled, and even to be part of that plan? Only if you are in Christ, are you worthy. Our true worth, in other words, is found in someone outside of ourselves. Hollywood, of course, and most of the rest of the world, will tell us the exact opposite. It tells us that our worth is inside of ourselves. Advertisements bombard us with messages of self-worth. Of course, in the case of advertisements, you aren't really full of worth until you have their product. Hollywood's message is that you need to pull on your resources, skills, and personality in order to succeed. You're worth it, Hollywood says.

However, as we said, our worth is defined by our relationships to the two Adams. So, even the unbeliever has worth by being related to Adam, because that means that he is made in the image of God. But the unbeliever has twisted and warped that image, severely damaging the value of that image. Christ, however, is the ultimate restorer of the image of God. Through the Holy Spirit, when we are born again, that image is made bright and whole once more. And so, our relationship to the Second Adam determines our worth.

Many of us struggle with the issue of self-worth, or the lack thereof. Many people cannot even see the image of God in themselves. Many Christians cannot see the image as it has been restored. Many times we place our identity and self-worth in the wrong place. Friends, our worth is in Christ Jesus, which means we have infinite value, not because of ourselves, but because of what Jesus paid to redeem us.

This is something that can help us a great deal when we are struggling with sin. One of the things that sin does is that it affords Satan the occasion to accuse us of being worthless. Satan often drags the Christian down into the miry pit of despair with those whispered words, "You aren't worth anything, because you sinned." The answer for the Christians is simple, "I am worth the value of Jesus' blood in redeeming me." Self identity and self worth: locate them both in your Savior Jesus Christ, and you will have an unshakable foundation, no matter who or what in the world will ever accuse you of being worthless. For Jesus is always worthy.