Revelation 5:1-14

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 8th February 2026 @ Deal Christian Fellowship
Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Introduction

We are in the book of Revelation, this final book of 66 that the Bible consists of, that was written down by the apostle John, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, and who was one of his inner circle, along with Peter and James. And last week we studied chapter four where we saw a change of scene from the prior chapters. It's *still* the apostle John writing these things down that God is revealing to him, but now — rather than writing to and about the churches that were and are present — he is writing the things that would take place *after* those things of the church age took place. That is, there is a jump forward in time as we get to chapter four.

And as he describes the scene before him in the throne room of heaven, we see the church right there. Taken to heaven as Jesus promised, as Paul taught, and as John is now clearly recording — for as we'll consider this morning, the angels can never sing of themselves having been redeemed by Jesus' blood, yet these 24 elders — who we know are men, not angels — will do exactly that as they represent the church, recorded here in verse 9.

Overview of chapter five

- **v1-7** — Who is worthy to open & read the scroll?

- **v8-14** — Worthy is the Lamb who was slain

Now, as we look at this chapter we can split it into two halves, with the first 7 verses dealing with a question that brings John to tears — which is who is worthy to open the scroll that he sees in God holding in His hand? And what moves him to tears is that *no-one* is found worthy. That is, until we reach verses 6 & 7 where we find that there *is* One who can, who is Jesus, the Lamb of God.

And as we read verses 8-14 we find that all of heaven erupts into praise and worship of the Lamb, with the church worshipping her Lord like never before. And so let us not forget that this is us we reading about here! That is, if you know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, then this is the joy that awaits you. A joy like nothing else. And so we should have a great deal of excitement as we read these things.

Chapter five

So then, as we begin this chapter, God is sat on His throne, in appearance like a jasper and sardius stone (the meaning of which we saw last week pointed to Jesus, the Son of His right hand), and He is surrounded by a emerald-like rainbow, as well as the 24 lesser thrones of elders, representative of the church. And as we also saw in chapter one, the Holy Spirit is here (completing the picture of the Trinity) and there are four living creatures in the midst of and around the throne who do not rest day or night, saying: *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"*

It's an incredible scene, with the end of chapter four also recording the worship of the elders who cast their golden crowns before God in praise and adoration of Him. Worshipping Him as their Creator. And immediately following that we read here in verse 1 of chapter 5:

> **Revelation 5:1**
> And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

So what was this document? Well, first, this was, as translated here, a scroll — the predominant form for documents at the time, as opposed to books that later became the default. But as for it's content or purpose, that is sometimes debated. But what seems reasonable to me, is that this is, in effect, the title deed — the ownership document — to the earth. For indeed, we have an example back in Jeremiah 32 where he, as the kinsman redeemer, was entitled to purchase a piece of land from his cousin, which the Lord tells him to do.

And the *reason* was that there were those who had no right to the land that were trying to get a hold of it for themselves. And so God tells Jeremiah to purchase it, for in 70 years He would bring the people of Israel back the land and this piece of the land would be his. So, we read that he wrote on a scroll the information about the inheritance and sealed it, then on an open piece of papyri skin he writes the requirements for opening it, and they're both buried together in an earthen vessel — with the intent that in 70 years they would dig that up.

Here, this papyrus scroll that God is holding in His hand is written inside and out — but why? Well, initially, a title deed would be written only on the smooth side of the papyrus, and sealed with a single seal. But if the owner became unable to meet his financial obligations, he would have to relinquish his title deed — upon the back of which would be written his debts and upon which would be placed seven seals, just as would have been done with a will at that time (thus with the inside describing the inheritance, and the outside the requirements to open it). And if at any time during the ensuing seven years he could pay off his debts, the seals would be broken and the deed returned.

And so, what this seems to point to is that, through His rebellion against God, Adam had forfeited the ownership, the title deed to the earth, and it could only now be redeemed by One able to pay off his debts. So who could that be? Well that's what the following verses deal with. We read in verse 2:

> **Revelation 5:2**
> Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?”

Who, that is, could meet the necessary requirements to open this document? Who is worthy to do so? Well, note that the question is not "who is *willing*". For just as there were those willing to take hold of the land that was owned by Jeremiah's cousin, so there are many who have been *willing* to take hold of this earth; from Alexander the Great, to Julius Caesar, to Napoleon, and Hitler, plus there are of course many more *today* who would gladly take ownership of this planet. But again, the questions wasn't who is *willing*, but who is *worthy?*

> **Revelation 5:3**
> And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.

Picture that! Not only no obvious or *clear cut* candidates. But no candidates at all. No-one whatsoever that was *worthy* to open it, or even *look* at it. And this says so much about the human condition. That as Psalm 14 says *"There is none who does good"*, and as Psalm 53 echos *"There is none who does good, No, not one."* That as Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, *"...there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin."*

And so, here in heaven, there is no-one who by their own efforts was seen as good. No-human, out of those here in heaven (prior to the tribulation) as the Greek implies, was found worthy. And thus we read in verse 4:

> **Revelation 5:4**
> So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.

This wasn't just a few tears, but *wailing*. That is, John “sobbed convulsively", overcome with grief as he faced the prospect that this earth would remain in Satan's grasp forever. That it would continue in sin and sorrow. When we think of it like that, shouldn't it move us too?

I mean; do we really want to see the wickedness of this world continue forever? Do we really want to see murders, rapes, extortion, prejudice, embezzlement, adultery, maliciousness, drunkenness, and covetousness continue? Of course we don't. But who is going to put it right? Who even has the power, or the right to put it right? Who can possibly judge the world in righteousness?

This is what grieved John, for there was no-one that could stand up to this task. That is, until we read in verse 5:

> **Revelation 5:5**
> But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

And so one of the elders speaks to John and says stop it! Stop crying. There's no need. Because there *is* One who *has* overcome, who *has* conquered, who *is* able to both open the scroll and to loose its seals. So who *is* that One? Well, it's Jesus, of course. And He is described in two ways here. The first is as the *Lion of the tribe of Judah,* which takes us back to Genesis 49 where Jacob calls his sons together that he might bless them, saying of his fourth-born son:

> **Genesis 49:9-10**
> Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

And you may recall from our study of Genesis that this referred to the decision making power of Israel to administer capital punishment, and that the authority to do that would not be removed from Israel until Shiloh, speaking of the Messiah, had come (shiloh meaning rest and tranquility). Which is why, when the Roman authorities removed this power from them in AD12, Josephus (the Jewish historian) recorded that Rabbis were running through the streets of Jerusalem screaming in anguish. Why? Because they thought scripture was somehow broken. But little did they realise that growing up in Nazareth was a young boy by the name of Jesus, who was their Messiah. Prophecy, and indeed scripture, had not been broken at all.

And perhaps, *we* can too *easily* weep when we look at this world around us, and think that there's no hope for it, when in fact our Lord and Saviour — Jesus — is *indeed* going to put all things right, in His way, in His timing. For He has *already* prevailed. And He is worthy to open this title-deed to the earth, to rightfully claim it, to redeem it to Himself.

Here, John was *weeping* until he heard that there *was* One who could open this scroll. But *having* been told by one of the elders to behold, to look, to open his eyes, he does so. But he doesn't see a Lion, but a Lamb. We read:

> **Revelation 5:6**
> And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

So then, in the midst of *the* throne John saw someone distinct from the four living creatures and the elders, again not described as a Lion, but a Lamb, pointing us now not to the *government* of God, but the *grace* of God. And of course, this is Jesus — *the* Lamb who had been slain. The apostle John having previously recorded in his gospel account how John the Baptist declared *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

And this is remarkable. For throughout the Old Testament we find events that pointed to what Jesus would do on the cross for you and I. From the promise in Genesis chapter 3 that Jesus would bruise Satan's head, to Abraham offering his only Son up as a sacrifice (in the very place that Jesus would be offered up), to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up in the wilderness (that even Jesus noted was a foreshadow of what He would do). And more examples beside.

But in heaven there will evidently be something about Jesus' appearance that will remind us not of what He will *do*, but what He has *done*. That (as we read in Philippians chapter 2) He, "*being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*" A death so brutal that his face was disfigured more than any man has suffered — as the crown of thorns was placed on His head, as His beard was plucked out, as His back was beaten, as His hands and feet had nails driven through them. Here is the lamb is standing with the marks of slaughter upon it. An everlasting reminder of how much it cost to pay for our sin.

Yet that death was not final. For He rose from the dead, ascended to Heaven, and now we see Him standing here. The seven horns indicative of the Holy Spirit upon Him. And these seven eyes indicative of how He sees everything, how He is all-knowing, how He is omniscient. And *this* One, *this* Man is worthy to take the scroll. And so we read:

> **Revelation 5:7**
> Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

And this is wonderful news for us, the beneficiaries of His grace, for it means He *will* put all things right. But as we will see starting next week in chapter six, this is terrifying news for those who don't know Him as their Saviour, that there is One who *is* Holy, that *is* worthy to take this scroll. For the opening of these seals will begin the judgement of this earth.

> **Revelation 5:8**
> Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

So as we should expect, as One who is *this* worthy stands up to take the scroll, the living creatures and elders prepare to worship Him in song. And we read here that the elders each have harps — the specific kind noted in the original Greek being more of a lyre, a smaller handheld version of a harp than we might first picture. So there's musical instruments in heaven. Stringed instruments too. So don't let anyone tell you that it's not Biblical to sing songs accompanied by instruments in praise and worship of God!

But we also read of something else the elders have. And that is these golden bowls full of incense, which we are told clearly here are the prayers of the saints. And I wonder — which prayers? Well, we're not told *some* of the prayers. So perhaps this is indeed all of the prayers that you and I have ever prayed. For we read in Psalm 56 that God has put our tears in a bottle, and recorded them and all our wanderings in His book. There is no suggestion that any of our prayers are ever lost. They don't fall down the back of the sofa. They are here before the throne of God.

So let us remember that God *does* hear our prayers — at least when our heart is right with Him — and while they may not be answered in our timing, or in the way we ask, He does answer. So let us pray! For this throne of grace we are reading about here in heaven, is the throne that we already and remarkably have access to because of what Jesus has done. So let us boldly approach Him, that (as we read in Hebrews 4) we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

And as we consider how truly wonderful it is that Jesus has opened up the veil that we might enter into God's presence, let us take note of the undiluted worship the elders now offer up in verses nine and ten. We read:

> **Revelation 5:9-10**
> And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals;
> For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

And so they sing a new song. Remarkably without anyone complaining that it's not their favourite hymn. Or that they don't like the tune of the new song. Which that alone tells you this must be taking place in heaven, right?!

But with real seriousness, look at *what* is sung. There's a reason why John records the words and not the chords to this song. For the elders sing of *God's* worthiness, of *Jesus*' sacrifice and *His* accomplishment through *His* blood, that has saved people out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And how *He* has made us kings and priests to our God, that in the future will reign with *Him* on earth. There's no mention of what *they* did, or how *they* felt, or of their *emotions*, or of their *lives*. In short there is nothing that is man-focussed here. It is all God-focussed.

And that is a pattern we should take note of. For when it comes to worship, the attraction should be God. It shouldn't be a performance, but rather it should be congregational and participational. It should not reflect culture, but reflect God. Indeed, as one person put it *"True worship is not something we listen to, experience, or "soak in". Worship is when we minister to God!"* And that is what is happening here before the throne of God.

We should think of worship as worth-ship. Us ascribing worth to God. Not to ourselves. That as John the Baptist said of Jesus, *"He must increase, but I must decrease."*

For we brought nothing but our sin. But on *His* part we read that He has redeemed us. What does that mean? Well, here a specific word is used that means to buy or purchase us as if buying us out of a slave market. An analogy Paul also uses in Romans to describe how we were slaves to sin. But He has redeemed us *from* that through a violent death, through the spilling of His blood, Through the crucifixion He *allowed* to happen to Him, that we might be set free.

And so let us note, that the elders, representing the church before the throne here, are not shy of talking about the blood of Christ shed for us, for that is the only way that any of us will be there! They are not shy of talking about sin and forgiveness — for our sin is what required Jesus to die for us, and His forgiveness is the result of what He did in dying in our place. The Lamb that was *slain* is in the midst of everything. This is the revelation of Jesus Christ, after all. And it is such an absolute tragedy how some churches, as far back as the 80s, have made moves to take hymns out of their churches that speak about the blood. Without Jesus blood shed for us, we cannot be saved! So let us not be unwilling to sing about it.

Furthermore, let us note what *else* is sung here. For the elders, and I believe the *whole* church here, is not singing merely about themselves as *individuals*, but how God has redeemed those from *every* tribe and tongue and people and nation — the terms tribe and people used typically of Israel, and the terms tongue and nation used typically of the Gentiles. And we see no divide based on ethnicity, colour, language or place of birth. A reminder that that is how the church should be now too. And if you've ever been in a church setting where people are singing the same song in multiple languages at the same time you'll know how special that is.

But let us not miss the most important thing here, that the worship is of God. Those around the throne are not worshipping worship. They are not admiring a performance. They are, with everything they have, worshipping the One who has saved them from an eternity in hell, and has done so at the highest cost imaginable — not to them, but to Himself. Oh how worthy He is!!

Now, before we move further on there's something I need to talk about. For if you have been reading these scriptures from the slides I have on screen, or following along in your *own* copy of the New King James Version Bible, or indeed in the King James Version, then you will have *read* that these verses speak of those in heaven saying *"For You were slain, And have redeemed **us** to God by Your blood"* and *"have made **us** kings and priests to our God"*.

But if you are reading almost any *modern* version of the Bible, you will not read the word *us* but instead you will read the word ***them*** or ***men*** in this passage. So which is it? Well, first, let me tell you *why* this matters. Why it is important. For if the word is ***us***, then it places the church here in heaven, right at this moment, before the tribulation begins. But if the words are ***them*** or ***men*** then it adds support to the idea that the church would not arrive in heaven until later on, until it has experienced at least part of the tribulation. Some, I believe, even use it in support of there being no rapture.

Now, that said, I think there is already enough weight of scripture and the foreshadows contained within it to make clear that the church will *not* endure any part of the tribulation, but will indeed be taken to heaven. But because the principle here also matters for other parts of the Bible, I want to draw your attention to the fact that not all translations are equally good. That is, while the Bible, which is free from error, was written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, *translations* in some cases, have changed details of scripture that cause problems in our theology, which leads to problems in our application. And this morning I want to talk about one of the specific issues we see.

You see, in many modern translations, even alongside a good translation like the NKJV, you'll find phrases in the margin notes (which of course are not part of the Bible itself) that say things like "the *oldest* manuscripts say this", or "the *best* manuscripts say that", or "the *original* manuscripts say this", or "the most *authoritative* manuscripts say that" — but note that at best those notes are wrong, and at worst they are outright lies. Lies? That's a bold statement, right? Well, yes. Lies.

You see, the book of Revelation is made up of just over 200 different fragments and manuscripts to put it together. Basically 95 major manuscripts along with pieces of them. And what some will say, including via these margin notes, is "did you know that out of the 95 Greek manuscripts, only 23 of them say *us*?!". And that gets you thinking... "wow, if only 23 have the word *us* then maybe that's not what it says!". But what they *don't* tell you is that only 24 out of the 95 manuscripts contain chapter 5 verses 9 and 10 *at all*, and the *only* one of those 24 manuscripts that says them and men, is the Alexandrinus. *All* of the rest of them say us. *All* of the early Latin versions say *us*. Hippolytus, Irenaeus, and Cyprian, quoting these verses in the early centuries, say *us*.

And I could go on. But suffice to say, you need to be very careful with the margin notes in your Bible, because they are not the Bible itself. And you also would be wise to choose a good translation of the Bible, especially for serious study of God's Word. And I would recommend the New King James Version, or the King James Version. But make no mistake, a good translation won't help you if you don't read it or obey what God says in it.

Now, these things are important to mention, because we don't often dig into those things. But if you want to know more then I highly recommend listening to Joe Focht's study on this passage, or talk to Pete who has spent countless hours looking into these things, into where the various translations of the Bible came from, and what you need to watch out for.

For these things do make a difference. Indeed, I don't want any of you to doubt what the Bible actually says. For if you remove the rapture, you remove your hope that is there to purify us. And if you believe that God will allow His bride to endure the tribulation, then you call His character into question among other things. So be careful, that you not be deceived in any way.

Now, back to this wonderful chapter that gives us a glimpse of what awaits us, having seen how the elders fall down in total worship of the Lamb who redeemed us by His own blood, we find the apostle John writes next:

> **Revelation 5:11-12**
> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living 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 who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honour and glory and blessing!”

So again, the angels and elders are distinct. They are not the same. But so are the measures of the numbers of them, with many angels noted. But not only *24* elders, but we read, *the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*. And in English that's a large number, meaning at least 100 million people. Yet the Greek word used here is where we get the word myriad, meaning an indefinite number of people. And they are all praising God.

First, declaring again that He is worthy, second putting His sacrifice for us front and centre, and third expressing the many ways in which He should be praised. And look, none of this is tentative. None of it is half-hearted. They are singing with a loud voice. So why don't we lift the roof of this place off when praise and worship God in song? I know we're British, and that means we're not exactly the most animated of people when something good happens or we're happy about something. But there is nothing greater in the history of the whole universe than what Christ has done for you and me.

So let us praise Him! Not like a church *mouse*, but like the *church* itself, for we have been saved by the shedding of His blood, which has paid for all our sin! Indeed, while back in chapter *four* verse eleven we saw how He was praised for His creative acts here in chapter *five* verse eleven, He is praised for His redemptive acts. So let us do that today. For one day in heaven we'll do so, and I suspect we'll be amazed, and perhaps saddened, at how unenthusiastically we once worshipped Him compared to the vigour with which He is worthy to be praised.

We read in verse 13, as all creation joins in:

> **Revelation 5:13**
> 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, I heard saying: “Blessing and honour and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

To which the crowd here in heaven responds. We read:

> **Revelation 5:14**
> Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

So the living creatures, in full agreement with what has just been declared, along with the elders, fall down in worship of the One who has saved multitudes beyond number. Who is without limit, and without end. Who is worthy of all our praise, and will indeed be most worthy in that moment as He takes this scroll — the title deed to this earth — into His hand, that He may put all things right.

Application questions

Now, there's no shortage of things to ponder here. But let me suggest a few things:

- Have you grasped how serious our sin is before God? (not one was found worthy)
- Is your worship God-focussed, or self-focussed? (not just about lyrics, but your heart too)
- Are you worshipping God with the enthusiasm He deserves? (He is the only One who is worthy!)

For the audio recording of this Bible study, and for additional studies, please see the DCF web site: