

## **Third Sunday of Easter**

April 9, 2018

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, NM

**Revelation 5:8-14** And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. **9** And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. **10** You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

**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. **12** In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

**13** Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

**14** The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

### **"The Lamb Transforms the Unworthy"**

When you close your eyes and picture heaven, what do you see? Do you see a favorite vacation without all the agonizing work you had to get through to earn it? Do you visualize majestic mountains without all the effort and time it takes to arrive there? Pristine beaches in a tropical location without the costs of making it happen? Do you picture a cherished childhood memory, the one spot where you truly feel at home without any of the negative emotions or problems or regular life? The best birthday you've ever had multiplied by 1000? Your wedding day or graduation party taken up to rock star status?

In Revelation chapter 5 Jesus provides us a glimpse into heaven when he provides this vision to the Apostle John. And the most striking thing about this vision isn't what or where or what amazing scenery we see. It's who. Jesus is there because of his worthiness. Jesus wants us to see some amazing people assembled with him in heaven. The surprising thing is what makes them worthy of being there. And with this picture of heaven, He wants to transform us. Transform our thinking about him and about ourselves and our lives this side of heaven.

Recently some of the most powerful people in charge of social media have been in the news. Congress has gotten involved and columnists are wringing their hands about the power and the influence these digital communities have over the way we think and act. And yet, for all the outrage, it seems very unlikely that there will be significant change. People who know the inner workings behind the success of social media understand the kind of topics that algorithms really react to. Outrage. Emotional appeals get attention across social media

platforms. But stronger than joy, spreading faster than sadness or disgust, outrage is the emotion people are most likely to respond to and share and pass along.<sup>1</sup>

That's probably the best explanation for what really gets Christians going as well. Outrage at what's going on in our world gets our attention. Politicians who seem to back us into a corner with legislation and executive action. Hollywood morals thrust upon us, bombarding us from all sides. Behind so many of the cultural battles that capture our attention and consume our energies lies this outrage. We fear that we need to stand up for Christianity against political and cultural invasions. We need to fight back against people's false perceptions of Christianity. We feel the need to push back when popular opinion stereotypes Christians out of a profound biblical ignorance.

And then, we have to pause and think about the picture of Christianity we are giving in our lives. Revelation chapter five describes a song echoing through heaven's throne room. My songs are so often personal. They are built around my unique experiences and express my personal feelings.

My life becomes an old song of trying to justify myself and make people think I am worthy. You don't have to be someone checking in on Instagram or Facebook or Twitter 20 times each day. We all do it. We just do it in different ways. We put on these masks. We adopt false personas. We cover up the real person we don't want people to see. We hide the person we fear everyone else will reject. We make more effort to be accepted by a certain group or clique so they will recognize us for who we want to be. We try to get into the right school. We try to boost our image by getting the right grades to be seen the right way at school. We find our identity in the achievements of our children, adopting their grades and their athletic prowess as reflections on our parenting skills. We adopt the exactly appropriate fashion trends to give the image we want. We adopt the right devices so that the gadgets we use will project the right image to make people think we are interesting and appealing. We give and sacrifice for family and friends and loved ones so they won't look down on us. We put ourselves through this daily routine in the hopes that people will find us worthy in their eyes. We are doing and working and striving for something that feels so right. We feel like we could earn love and respect and acceptance.

There is a reason why Jesus gives us a different focus in Revelation chapter 5. It's not a video recap of all your accomplishments. It's not a trophy room filled with everything you've won. It's not a collection of likes and smiling emotions for everything you've done to earn someone's approval. Instead, our attention is taken off of ourselves. Everything and everyone is directing their gaze toward the Lamb. Here is the content of the new song echoing through the halls of heaven: **"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation."** (Revelation 5:9)

The Lamb gets the focus for what he does. And Jesus, your Lamb, has to do it. Because if you could do it on your own, you wouldn't really need him. If you were really worthy, then you

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis C. Madrigal "The Case Against Retweets." The Atlantic. April 2018, p. 16-17. Print.

would require the Lamb. If it just meant getting into the right group, he wouldn't need to be your sacrifice. If it were just a matter of convincing people of how awesome you already are, he would not have been slain. If you could figure out worthiness, you would never need anyone to purchase you. If you could earn God's love, then this world wouldn't require the transaction Jesus made at the cross. If you could be acceptable on your own, Jesus would not have had to pay the ultimate price to make you his own. If you could strive and work and improve enough to get into God's good graces, then Jesus would not have needed to acquire you at the cost of his own blood. If you could ever be just ok by yourself, there would be no urgency for him to give you an entirely new belonging through his death and resurrection.

Every once in a while you will hear someone say a really foolish thing about what Jesus really did on the cross. They will claim that it is some outdated religious superstition that God demanded the blood of his own Son. They might even label it cosmic child abuse that Jesus died to satisfy the wrath of an angry God.<sup>2</sup> But then what do you do with the consequences of what Jesus did on the cross? If Jesus wasn't really slain to shed his real blood to buy back sinful people for God, then you are still on the hook for your own worthiness.

But if Jesus did pay the price, then there is nothing you need to do to become worthy. If Jesus gave his life in exchange for yours, then you are freed from the tyranny of trying to measure up. If Jesus shed his blood on the cross, then he covers over all of your unworthiness. If Jesus was actually and truly slaughtered brutally on his cross, then his life right now is a real life. His resurrection means you have a new life with your merciful and forgiving God.

If your Lamb did that for you, then it gives you a very different view of heaven. Because of the Lamb, you are there. You are in heaven with the Lamb. You are joined together with all those people from every tribe and language and nation. You are part of this indescribable celebration. You get to join in the celestial chorus singing praises to the Lamb for his worthiness. When we take the focus off of ourselves and put it all on Jesus, we find the very best reason to sing a new song.

It changes our attempts at making people see our worthiness to celebrating the worthiness Jesus gives us. It changes our outrage to joy. So what does the Lamb need from us if he provides everything necessary for our salvation? Nothing, really. All we get in this glimpse of heaven is an expression of our new belonging and true identity with the Lamb: **"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."** (Revelation 5:10) Filled with the worthiness of the Lamb, you and I just get to be what he has made us to be. We get to give him the worship and honor that he deserves.

A young tourist was amazed when he was able to visit Westminster Abbey in London. There was so much to see and soak up. Sculptures of saints. Gorgeous chandeliers. The roof has

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Nicholas Phillips. "Why Jesus Had to Die: Part I" 2016 March 22. <https://medium.com/@adamnicholasphillips/why-jesus-had-to-die-2004689221a>

such a unique shape. The floor covered in hand-painted tiles. Even the pillars were works of architectural and engineering art, each one consisting of smaller pillars rising up to become one column. And when worship started, he couldn't stop staring at the sights all around him.

The next day he went to St. Paul's Cathedral, which proved even more amazing. While the stained glass in Westminster was awesome, St. Paul's had a stunning hand-painted ceiling; he could have stared at it for hours. But what really made the latter visit more memorable was what he heard in the service. Yes, this time he listened!—to the hymns, the chorale anthems, the sermon. The preacher spoke about the shepherd who would leave the ninety-nine sheep while looking for the one that was lost. Tears came to the young man's eyes as he heard the preacher say, *"Do you believe that you, as a mere mortal, a sinner, can change heaven? Yes, the Bible tells us that heaven rejoices when a sinner repents; when you repent, God rejoices! Entire heaven rejoices!"* Quoting Jesus, the pastor said, *"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."*

The glory of God is not in the cathedral itself, just as the joy of heaven is not in its gold and gleam and perfect harmonies. The real glory of God's place in heaven or any house of worship here is in the essential message of God's grace, which transforms lives, which speaks of forgiveness and life in Jesus' name (Rev 5:9–10).

And since we don't get to experience heaven first hand just yet, right now is your chance to give the world around a sneak preview. You don't need to live your life consumed by boosting your own self-image. Your life can be filled with heavenly praise: **"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"** (Revelation 5:13) You don't have to be backed into a corner by the culture wars raging around you. You have confidence of your ultimate destination. You don't have to look on the people surrounding you with suspicion. They too are ones, just like you, for whom the Lamb was slain. They might be from a different tribe and speak a different language and hail from another nation, but they are ones purchased for God by the blood of the Lamb.

And God can do some amazing transformation in your life. He can even use you. He can use your praise and worship giving glory and honor to the Lamb to transform lives. The people you want to impress and the people you want protection against aren't impervious to God's transformation. They too can be added to a better vision of heaven. A picture of heaven that includes you. A picture of heaven that won't require you to close your eyes and dream about your personal vision. You will be part of the picture of all God's people singing a new song. And then the only thing left will be to say: "Amen!" Amen.

*+ Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. +*