

## *Worthy is the Lamb*

† **Slain for us** (vv. 11,12)

† **Worshipped as God** (vv. 13,14)

In the name of the Lamb, dearly redeemed servants of God:

The fifth chapter of Revelation is part of the second of John's seven visions which Jesus gave him on the Lord's day nearly 2,000 years ago. The dear Holy Spirit is using John like a high definition camera to point heavenward for encouragement and earthward for warning about what the future holds. Only one apostle was still alive. John alone of the Twelve had not been martyred for his faithful witness. And now the Church of Christ on earth was facing severe persecution. Worse yet, John was exiled to the penal island of Patmos. Everything their eyes told them about the confiscation of their property, arrest and imprisonment of their leaders, the gladiatorial execution of men, women and children for pagan entertainment – all their visuals screamed defeat. But as God's people, "*we walk by faith, not by sight.*" (2 Corinthians 5:7) Faith is upheld by the promises of triumph in our victorious Lamb of God.

But what kind of hero is a lamb? Wouldn't you rather choose a war hero or at least a poet to say things to lift your spirits? What about a champion to encourage more practical things like athletics? A powerful dog would be more attractive than a lamb for protection. We're right there cheering with John when "*the Lion from the tribe of Judah*" (5:5) steps up to open the seals on the book of history. God's people need to know where things are headed. But a Lamb that was...?

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John heard "*the voice of many angels surrounding the throne.*" (NETNT) They also surrounded a circle of twenty-four elders seated on thrones around four living creatures, cherubim, who stood at the ready around the throne of God. We tend to forget, especially in times of danger, that the angels have been created and commanded by God to serve believers in Jesus. (Hebrews 1:14) But we have a more detailed picture of their work from the previous chapter: "*Before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."*" (Revelation 4:6-8 NIV) All God's angels are praising the Trinity and watching God's world.

But how can they worship a Lamb that was **Slain**? Jesus left His "Father's throne of light, [His] rainbow-circled throne...for earthly night and wanderings sad and lone." (CW 454:2) He was born so poor there wasn't even room in an inn, just a stable with the animals. And it was downhill from there to a most shameful death on a cross and burial in a borrowed grave. How can He be "*worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!*"

"*Though He was rich, yet for [our] sake became poor, so that [we] through His poverty might become rich.*" (2 Corinthians 8:9) Surely He deserves all the eternal, boundless riches of heaven for His personal sacrifice. **Worthy is the Lamb** that was **Slain for us**. Jesus became weak to make us strong. Now He assures us, "*My power is made perfect in weakness.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9) Since "*God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble,*" in the weakness of humble contrition God uses the dynamite-power of His Gospel to bless our souls with new life. Just as in the weakness of Christ's deepest

humiliation to the grave God exerted His power in raising Christ, so in our being ***“buried with [Christ] through baptism into death”*** (Romans 6:4), He raises us by His life-giving power to the glorious new life of freedom. He continues to exert this Gospel-power in our holy life of sanctification and in blessing our efforts in Jesus’ Name. How vast is His power and love for sinners!

**Worthy is the Lamb** who was **Slain for us!** Jesus graciously made us rich through the poverty of His State of Humiliation. Now in His State of Exaltation, He is more than worthy to receive back all the riches of the world. Do you truly believe this? Then shouldn’t we have less hesitation about bringing a generous offering to Jesus for His work than they would about giving a \$100 to a waitress in a restaurant? This is very personal, isn’t it? We may be perfectly willing to ascribe to Jesus all these blessings, but can we say with complete confidence, **Worthy is the Lamb** to be...?

### ✠ **Worshipped as God (vv. 13,14)**

Don’t be fooled by the fact and Jesus is given the same praise as God the Father who is sitting on the throne. This is a solid picture of authority as we saw at the empty grave of Jesus on Easter morning. Remember what the angel was doing? Jesus had conquered death itself. And His holy angel was sitting on the very stone that proved powerless as the grave to hold the Lord of life. As victorious soldiers would stand on the necks of vanquished foes, so a member of the heavenly legions sat on the door of the vanquished grave. The Father sits in full authority and wants His glorified Son to be **Worshipped as God**.

For all the blessings Jesus brings He surely deserves to be **Worshipped**. Who can put a price tag on the gifts of His Holy Spirit? In Christ we find ***“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*** (Galatians 5:22f) The dear Holy Spirit works in our hearts through Word and sacrament, making us grow in our holy lives of Sanctification. He gives priceless “riches” for our lives that defy the devil, the world and our sinful flesh with all its sickness and grief. How we long for that Day when we will see it all and feel it in these tired bodies!

And how joyfully nature itself will worship **the Lamb...as God!** ***“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.”***

All of earth’s kingdoms and empires have eventually crumbled into dust. That of Alexander the Great could not even survive his death. Even the Roman Empire finally collapsed though it once seemed totally invincible. But the Kingdom of Christ, founded on God’s power and established by His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection will never fall even when all the “natural” forces of earth and heaven come tumbling down. He who created and sustains nature will finally make it the home of righteousness He desires. ***“Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”*** (Isaiah 9:7 NIV)

Over the centuries artists like Albrecht Durer (“Praying Hands”) have tried to picture for us the worship of God’s worthy Lamb. The lines are fuzzy on Durer’s old wood cuts. We can only see the Day of Christ’s return with the eyes of faith, eyes which still are dimmed by sin and doubt. But God’s Word continues to strengthen and uphold us in the midst of all life’s challenges.

Next week we will hear about the ***“great multitude that no one [can] count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They [will be] wearing white robes and...holding palm branches in their hands...[crying out] in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”*** (NIV)

Soon with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders and the countless angelic hosts we too will bow down and worship with a glorious shout. We long for that great ***“Amen!”***