

How do you respond when you find yourself in the presence of greatness? Excited? Intimidated? Awe-struck?

illus: As I grew up in the 70's and 80's, Stampede Wrestling, and later the WWF, was a regular fixture in our home. Every Saturday morning my brothers and I would tune in to catch a glimpse of the heroes and the villains of wrestling: the British Bulldogs, the Iron Sheik, and of course Brett The Hitman Hart.

By a show of hand, how many of you have ever heard of Brett The Hitman Hart? Brett was an athletic, powerful, charismatic figure. A seven time heavy weight champion, the Hitman was instrumental in putting WWF, now WWE, on the map. Brett's tagline was—*The best there is, the best there was, the best there will ever be*. Clearly, he was not lacking in confidence.

In the late 90's I was living in Calgary and working with Jr. High students as a youth pastor, while my colleague, Grant, worked with the High School students. Grant and I made quite a pair—he was as tall and wide as I was short and thin. At 6'4", with broad shoulders, and size 15 shoes, Grant towered over me and had a personality that was larger than life; Grant is still one of my favourite people in the world.

One day Grant was walking through the airport and who should he see but Brett the Hitman Hart. Grant couldn't believe it! Brett Hart was considered Canadian wrestling royalty. Grant decided he had to go over and say something, but what do you say to someone as great as Brett Hart? Grant went up to him, grabbed his hand, clapped him on the back and said, "*You're awesome man, you're awesome!*"

Brett responded saying, "*Thanks man, thanks*" and then walked away. Grant stood there for a few moments, watching the Hitman walk away, and then said to himself, "*You're awesome man? I'm such an idiot!*" Excited and awe-struck, Grant didn't know what to say in the presence of wrestling royalty.

I can only imagine that if you were invited to tea with her Royal Highness, Queen Elizabeth, you might feel slightly more awe-struck. If you were in the Queen's presence, what would you say? What would you wear? How would you act?

For those of you who are hockey players, imagine having the opportunity to join Sidney Crosby or Connor McDavid for their morning skate.

Dean Thiessen, who was playing keys for us this morning, is a brilliant pianist who has a passion to compose music. Imagine Dean that you could be transported back in time to be mentored by Beethoven, Mozart, or Bach. How would you feel? Awe-struck? Intimidated? Unworthy?

How do we respond when we find ourselves in the presence of greatness? Last week Pastor Paul said that God has created us to respond to beauty, majesty, greatness. And so, when we stand on top of the Grand Canyon, or fly down the face of Whistler Mountain, or sit and listen to the roaring waves in Maui, it evokes a sense of awe and wonder—it makes us feel, simultaneously, *alive and small*.

How do we respond to the One who created these wonders?

In Revelation 4, John describes the beauty and majesty of God the Father, seated on His throne. The invitation of Revelation 4 is this: **Worship God; He is Worthy!**

This theme of worship continues in Revelation 5 but the focus expands to include God the Son. Revelation 5 proclaims the worthiness of the Son and calls all of heaven and earth to join in singing His praise. As we look at this text this morning, I want to invite you to join in on what is going on—not as a passive observer, but as an active participant. What Jesus has done includes you and the activity of heaven—right now—calls for your participation.

At this time I would like to invite you to turn with me to Revelation 5:1-14. As I read the text, let me encourage you to pay particular attention to the word “**worthy**;” it is repeated 4 times and permeates the entire chapter. The text divides naturally into three sections: vs. 1-4, 5-7, and 8-13; I’m going to look at each one in turn beginning with vs. 1-4.

1. Who is Worthy? (vs. 1-4)

*“Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “**Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?**” 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. 4 I wept and wept because **no one was found who was worthy** to open the scroll or look inside.”*

The vision begins with God the Father on the throne; in His right

hand He held a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. In the ancient world, a sealed document functioned similarly to a sealed document in our own day; it remains unopened, waiting for its rightful recipient.

A mighty angel cries out, “*Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?*” No one was found in heaven or on earth who was worthy. John’s response is unexpected; he begins to weep. Now, if you or I were to find a letter that was unaddressed, and we couldn’t find the rightful recipient, we wouldn’t be too bothered about it. I can’t imagine we would break down and sob.

The fact that John weeps tells us something about the importance of this scroll, after all, it rests on the hands of the One who sits on the throne. If you read the rest of *Revelation*, the contents of this mysterious scroll are never spelled out, but, the opening of this scroll has unfolding implications. Metaphorically, this scroll represents God’s ultimate plans and purposes for heaven and earth; until this scroll is opened, God’s purposes remain stalled, suspended, frustrated.

The call goes out—*who is worthy?*—but no one is found. **Are these not humbling words?** *No one is worthy?* Think about all that humanity has accomplished:

- Human hands constructed the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids, and the Suez Canal—works of architectural and engineering genius!
- Think of the advances in science and medicine: we’ve built telescopes that reveal the galaxies, we’ve sent space probes to Mars, we can surgically repair a person’s heart, and do eye surgery with lasers—incredible!

- And think about Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, Michelangelo's *Sistine Chapel*, or Beethoven's *9th Symphony*—all of them, works of art.

Who is worthy? Not one of us, not even the angels are worthy to open the scroll, let alone, implement God's purposes for heaven and earth. God's purposes wait for One who is worthy to open the scroll. The question that was asked, *who is worthy?*, prompts another: *what makes one worthy to open the scroll?* The answer to this question will come later.

If vs. 1-4 ask the question, *who is worthy?*, vs. 5-7 answer the question saying, *the Lamb is worthy!*

2. The Lamb is Worthy! (vs. 5-7)

"5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." 6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

These three verses represent some of the most profound theology in the entire Bible. When we take these words and digest them as they are, we enter into the mystery of God's way in the world—the way from above. But many refuse to digest these words; we take them

and refashion them that we might end up with a god who is more to our liking; more on that in a few moments.

John is counselled to stop his weeping, the Worthy One has been found and the titles used to describe this Worthy One find their source in Old Testament Messianic language. The first title, *the Lion of the tribe of Judah*, comes from Genesis 49:9-10. The patriarch Jacob, spoke a word of prophecy over his son Judah. "*Judah, my son, is a young lion... The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the One to whom it belongs, the One whom all nations will honour.*" One of Judah's descendants would be a King before whom all nations will bow.

The second title, "*the root of David*," is taken from Isaiah 11; here the prophet Isaiah envisions the day when the Messiah will come in wisdom, righteousness, and power. On that day, the enemies of God's people will be defeated, the scattered people of God will return from exile, and the peace of God will cover the whole earth.

John turned expectantly, to see this Lion, Heaven's Champion, but when he looked he saw a Slaughtered Lamb. He discovered that **the Lion is a Lamb**. Only here in Revelation 5:5 is Jesus referred to as a Lion, but throughout the rest of the book He is referred to as "**the Lamb**" 28 times.¹ The fact that this title is used so frequently should tell us something important about the way God works in the world.

At the time Revelation was written, the Roman Empire was at the

¹ Note the importance/meaning associated with the number 7 in biblical literature. The number 7 was understood to be the number that represented "fullness, completeness, wholeness, or perfection." It is significant to note that in *Revelation* Jesus is referred to as "the Lamb" 28 times (7x4).

height of power and influence. Rome saw herself as a gift to the world, offering what they termed “Pax Romana”—*the peace of Rome*. But this “peace” came at the sharp end of Rome’s sword—they used violence and oppression to conquer surrounding nations; they then “kept the peace” by these same means. Everything Rome did was to protect her own interests and expand her glory at the expense of others.

The Book of Revelation pictures Satan as a Dragon, and Rome as the Beast that does his bidding. Let me ask you, *who would you rather represent you in battle against the Dragon and his Beast—would you prefer to send a **Lion or a Lamb?***

The opening vision of Jesus, in Revelation 1, describes Him in terms of power and majesty:

- eyes like blazing fire;
- His voice like the sound of crashing waves;
- In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword.

But in Revelation 5, we discover that **the Lion is a Lamb**—this is truly one of the greatest mysteries in Christian theology. Jesus battles the Dragon and his Beast in a radical and unconventional way; instead of a show of superior force, He allowed Himself to be led like a lamb to slaughter. Jesus conquers by submitting to death.

Revelation 5’s image of Jesus—as a slaughtered lamb—is clearly the language of sacrifice. John the Baptist spoke about Jesus saying, “*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” Isaiah 53:5-7 speaks prophetically of Him saying, “*he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment*

that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed...He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter”.

The New Testament is clear: the Lion is a Lamb! Jesus has triumphed over sin and death through His own sacrificial death. I have to admit, even as a long time Christian it takes effort to wrap my mind around this idea. There is a kind of logic to the Cross but it’s an internal logic; we need to lay aside our own categories (and preferences) in order to embrace the way from above.

Why did Jesus submit to death? Why not a show of power? The nature of the problem determines the nature of the solution. Let me offer the following analogy. When an infectious disease like Ebola is discovered, the only way to contain it is find and isolate the source. If you can eradicate the disease in the host, the battle is won. Or, if the host dies—in a contained environment—the disease itself will perish; it cannot live without a living host.

Jesus is the Host! In a substitutionary way, at the cross, Jesus absorbed the violence, oppression, and pain of the world; He took the sin of the world into Himself. In dying, the power of sin and death was broken. **The Lion conquered as a Lamb.**

But this way from above, the way of victory through sacrifice, challenges the way from the below—the way of self-protection, self-reliance, and power. More often than not, the way from below is the way we wish things were. We wish we could make our way through life with an all-powerful God at our side to ensure that we never get hurt, and never taste disappointment or defeat. Jesus never makes any such promise.

We wonder to ourselves, *if God is seated on the throne, why is there so much evil in the world?* Just as heaven and earth waited for the **Worthy One**, the slaughtered Lamb, so too we wait. We wait for the Lamb's return. We wait for Him to finish what He started: the final defeat of sin and sickness, an end to all death, and the restoration of the world. God has neither abandoned us, nor has He vacated His throne; He is present as the Lamb who suffers with His people.²

John writes, *"I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders."* Do you notice where Jesus is standing? Not off to the side, but in the centre of the throne. It's an image that powerfully communicates the union between the Father and the Son. What God does, Jesus does; what Jesus does, God does—they share the same being and purpose.³

Not only is the Lamb standing in the centre, but He has become the centre of everything—the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders have encircled Him.⁴ God the Father has not been pushed from the centre, rather, He is accompanied by the Son and the Spirit.

The Lamb is described as having seven horns, which is a strange way to imagine a lamb, but remember that this is apocalyptic language. The horns depict power and authority over the nations; the number seven signifies completeness, wholeness, perfection. The fact that the Lamb has seven horns reveals that His divine power and authority

are complete and beyond compare. The Lamb is also described as having seven eyes, which are explained as the sevenfold Spirit of God. Imagine it—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, at the centre of everything, with all of heaven watching, anticipating, and soon to be celebrating.

Who is worthy? The Lamb is worthy! And the final movement in our text invites us to join with heaven and earth in worshipping the Lamb.

3. Worship The Lamb! (vs. 8-13)

"8 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.

² Richard Bauckham, *The Theology Of The Book Of Revelation*, 64.

³ Bauckham, 63.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation*, 80.

*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 honour 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 honour and glory and power, for ever and ever! 14 The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.”

Vs. 8-13 describe an ever-expanding circle of worship, beginning with the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders. The elders are described in the Old Testament language of priestly worshippers: they have harps and they are “*holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people.*”

Psalm 141:2 says, “*May my prayer be set before You like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.*”

Revelation 5 envisions prayer as a fragrant offering to the Lord. I want you to consider this vision the next time you bow your head to pray. **How precious are our prayers if God stores them up in golden bowls?** The prayers we offer on earth are heard in heaven; they are not despised or dismissed.

Vs. 9 tells us that they sang a new song. Of course they sang a new song! Something new, something never before imagined had taken place. God the Son stepped into our world. He became human without ceasing to be God. Heaven’s Champion suffered and died on

the cross—a Lamb slain for the sins of the world. But **the Lamb is a Lion!** He broke the power of sin by taking our sin upon Himself. He triumphed over death by submitting to death, once for all. The song that is sung is the song of redemption.

In the ancient world, redemption was primarily an economic word. If you were desperate for cash flow you might sell something valuable to a pawn shop; if you want it back, you must buy it back—that’s redemption. In the ancient world, if a loved one had been sold into slavery, to redeem was to pay a price to set them free. At times the Bible describes sin as an enslaving power or force; the death and resurrection of Jesus breaks the power of sin and set us free.

This song is pointed. In describing the means, the effect, the breadth, and the goal of the redemption, we come to see just how worthy the Lamb is.

- How does the Lamb redeem? With His blood;
- What is the effect? Humanity has been “bought back”—released from bondage to sin;
- What is the breadth of this victory? People from every tribe, language, people, and nation;
- And what is the goal? That His people might be a kingdom and priests to serve God.⁵

In Revelation 5 we’re given a vision of where all of history is going. Through the Lamb, God has redeemed humanity, the earth will be restored, and humanity will resume the role given to Adam and Eve, namely, to steward the earth and extend His rule.

⁵ Fee, 85.

In vs. 11-12, the circle of worship expands. John looked and heard the “*voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand.*” The largest numeral available in the Greek language was the number 10,000; when John speaks of 10,000 x 10,000 he is simply saying that there were too many angels to count. This innumerable host of angels encircled the living creatures, the elders, and the throne, and they join in the worship of the Lamb.

Their song is pointed as well. Who is worthy to open the scroll and bring God’s purposes into being? The Lamb is worthy!

In Revelation 4, the One who sits on the throne is said to be worthy of glory, honour, and power, and here these same three are applied to the Lamb but then expanded. “*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!*” The three words of praise are expanded to 7—again the number 7—the completed work of God deserves complete and total worship.

Moments later, in vs. 13, the entire created order breaks out in a final doxology— “*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!*”

Conclusion: When we stand in the presence of greatness, it evokes a sense of awe and wonder—it makes us feel, simultaneously, both *alive and small*. Revelation 5 announces the worthiness of the Lamb and calls all of heaven and earth to join in worship. This morning I

want to invite you, as an active participant, to join in the worship that is already going on. Jesus’ work of redemption extends to include me and you; will you receive by faith the redemption He offers?

To worship is to recognize the true value of something, to ascribe worth. As we conclude this morning, let’s lift our voices in praise to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.

Worship

- *Worthy Of It All*
- *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow (Doxology)*

Invitation To Prayer Ministry

Invitation to Q&A

Benediction

“*To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!*”⁶ And to you, the people of God, may His love surround you, His peace be upon you, His joy fill you, and His hope sustain you. Amen.

⁶ Romans 16:27