**WORTHY IS THE LAMB**

October 7, 2012

Revelation 4:1-5:14

Key Verse: 5:12 “In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’”

At this thanksgiving, there are many reasons to be thankful for. But we can thank God and Christ for two reasons: First, God is the Creator. God gave us our previous lives. Second, God redeemed us through Jesus Christ. He died on the cross so that we may be children of God and participate in the glorious heavenly worship.

I. We thank God because he is the Holy, Almighty Creator (4:1-11)

In this part, John is taken up to heaven and witness a worship service in heaven. He saw God sitting in his throne in majesty. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads (4). Most likely, they represent the twelve tribes and the apostles. They are the redeemed of the Lord throughout all ages. They have been sanctified and given glory and authority from God. Then, in the center, around the throne, were four living creatures. They were covered with eyes, in front and back, and they had six wings. These four living creatures are, in a sense, worship leaders. On their cue, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him. They lay their crowns before the throne as they worship (10b). These crowns represent the church triumphant. God has given victory to his church in accomplishing its purpose. This victory has come through many individual battles and through the church’s corporate struggle as well. Finally the church’s victory is given back to God. This is part of worship. This is why we must overcome the world and render victory and glory to God in our personal lives and as a church.

The elders’ words of worship are recorded in verse 11. They say, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” God created all things, including each person’s life. Why do each of us have life? It is because God decided to give us life. We exist purely out of God’s kindness and grace. This is why we worship God, our Creator. This is why we give thanks to God.

God provides everything we need such as the air we breathe, water, food, family, friends, meaningful work, culture and art, and all good things. We must thank God for the beautiful sunsets, the majestic mountains, and all the miracles of nature. These days we see the falling leaves: bright yellow, orange, red, even purple. They are so beautiful. If we are poetic, we can write beautiful poems about the falling leaves. But some people are only burdened by them and complain that they will have to rake them up soon. Canada is a most blessed nation with good air, good water, good soil, good systems and so on. So we must thank God that we live in Canada. However, some people do not thank God in spite of all his goodness and grace. Instead they find reasons to complain. Romans 1:21 says, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” People become very sick in mind and heart when they complain. An unthankful mind is like an infectious disease that eats away all the good things in a person until they are miserable. When we complain, Satan begins to work. But when we thank God, the Holy Spirit works and many good things happen.

Reading Helen Keller’s essay, ‘3 Days to See,’ gives us an idea of just how many things we have to be thankful for.   
  
‘If, by some miracle, I were granted three seeing days, to be followed by a relapse into darkness, I should divide the period into three parts...First I should like to gaze long upon the face of my dear teacher, Mrs. Ann Sullivan Macy, who came to me when I was a child and opened the outer world to me...The next day - the second day of sight - I should arise with the dawn and see the thrilling miracle by which night is transformed into day...   
  
The following morning, I should again greet the dawn, anxious to discover new delights, for I am sure that, for those who have eyes which really see, the dawn of each day must be a perpetually new revelation of beauty...Now I begin my rounds of the city. First, I stand at a busy corner, merely looking at people, trying by sight of them to understand something of their lives. I see smiles, and I am happy. I see serious determination, and I am proud. I see suffering, and I am compassionate. On the evening of the third day, I would want to come home and pray and thank God who opened my eyes for three days to see.   
  
Helen Keller wished for ordinary things that we take for granted. If we think for a minute, we realize there are so many small graces we receive from God which we should be thankful for.

II. We thank Jesus Christ because he is our Redeemer (5:1-14)

In chapter 5:1, John’s attention is drawn to the right hand of him who sits on the throne. In his right hand, he holds a scroll. This scroll contains the decree of the sovereign Ruler of all. It is the written will of God. But it is sealed with seven seals. No one knows what is written in the scroll except God alone. Then a mighty angel steps forward and says, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” None of the angels dare to step forward. No human being dares step forward. Science and technology cannot help us here; neither can philosophy nor psychology. John begins to weep. He has a burning desire to know God’s will, but he is utterly helpless. Have you ever wept out of a deep desire to know God’s will? We need someone who is worthy to open the scroll for us. Who can do so? Look at verse 5. “’Then one of the elders said to him, ‘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.’”

John immediately turns to see this great lion that has just been described to him, but he does not see a lion. He sees a lamb. And not just any lamb, but one with death wounds. John can see the blood and the open wounds with which he has been inflicted. What a shock it must have been for John to look for this great lion who would rip the seals with his great claws, only to see a small wounded lamb. But it is the lamb who walks up to the One seated on the throne and takes the scroll. Then all the hosts of heaven fall on their faces and worship the Lamb. It is an incredible and astonishing scene.

A paradox is a seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true. Here is a paradox. How can a lion be a lamb? The two are opposites. One is the hunter and the other the prey. A lion-like lamb is an oxymoron. The terms do not belong together — except in heaven. Here the lion is the lamb. His power was found in his death, because with his death he purchased the souls of people, and he was thereby made worthy to open the scroll.

Here we see that God’s strength is disguised as weakness. Look at the Lamb of God dying on the cross. Was there ever any greater appearance of weakness on the part of God? They taunted him and said, “Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” (Matt 27:40). The irony was that he was able to come down from the cross, but chose not to. What God was doing was the most powerful act that he would ever perform. Greater than the creation of the world, and greater than bringing the world to an end, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was God at work in his greatest hour. His strength was hidden, but it was God’s most powerful moment. In this humble act of God, the devil was shamed and robbed of his power. We will never know, this side of heaven, what terrible struggles took place in the spiritual world between Palm Sunday and Easter morning. But one thing we do know: the lamb became a lion.

We are uncomfortable that Jesus asks us to join him in his weakness. He said, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt 11:29). We want to display power and have people see that we are on the winning side. It makes us feel important. Many people want to make friends with the rich and the famous. I am sure that if Psy comes to Toronto, many will go to see him because he is so successful. Actually, God could have won the world over through a consistent display of power. But then where would people’s hearts be? Would they love God for himself, or just for his power? Would they want God to use their lives, or would they want to use God for their own purposes? It was God’s wisdom that his power is displayed in weakness. Likewise our strength is found in weakness. The things that we see as limitations are the things which God is using to purify us and conform us into his likeness. An old monk named Theophan once wrote: “The Lord sometimes leaves in us some defects of character in order that we should learn humility. For without them we would immediately soar above the clouds in our own estimation and would place our throne there.” St. Paul said, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:9-10).

After the Lamb takes the scroll, another wave of praise and worship breaks forth. This wave is directed to the Lamb by the living creatures and the elders. They recognize that the Lamb is the only one in all creation who can fulfill God’s salvation plan and redeem his creation. True worship of the Lamb requires us to recognize this: Christ is the only one in all creation who can save us. When they realized this, they fell down before him. They also offered up intercessory prayer to God for the salvation of mankind. Intercessory prayer is an important part of worship. Then they take out their harps and sing a new song. Praise music and vocal teams and choruses are an important part of worship.

Look at verses 9-10. “And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.’” The redemption of the Lamb is truly great. Christ saves men from every tribe and language and people and nation. Christ saves people from Africa, Asia, Oceania, South America, Europe and North America. Christ’s changing power makes selfish people become sacrificial people, proud people become humble people, corrupted people become holy people. Christ’s redemption produces a kingdom of priests and a holy nation in fulfillment of God’s unchanging hope and purpose. 1 Peter 2:9,10 says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” In 1987, I was lost in despair, not knowing what to do with my life since I lost the dream of becoming a great mathematician. But God called me to be his child and made me a Bible teacher for young people in this generation. In spite of my weaknesses, God has used me last 25 years. Even though I am a bad singer, I will participate in the heavenly chorus.

As the great redemption wrought by the Lamb is revealed, another wave of praise and worship breaks forth. The angels in heaven, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand encircle the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sing: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Then another wave of praise breaks forth. Let’s read verses 13-14. “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.”

Today we have caught a glimpse of the worship of God and of Christ in heaven. We thank God for giving us life and for redeeming us through his Son Jesus Christ so that we may participate in the heavenly worship.