

I am pausing in our series on the Sermon on the Mount in the hopes of using the entire service in preparation for communion. What we are given in this passage is a worship service for the ages. Tears are shed, prayers are offered, the angelic citizens of heaven accompany the choir of the redeemed, all to praise Jesus Christ for the incomparable work of the salvation of sinners. In fact, so demonstrably glorious is Jesus Christ that there is not a creature that is not moved to declare His glory and bow their knees. Our most moving events in history cannot invoke the same resonance in all that is created. John himself is at one moment falling on his face in dread, as we see in chapter 1, then weeping in despair that no one is able to open the scroll in chapter 5, and then wanting for words to describe this unified proclamation of the glory of Jesus Christ which was declared by angels and sung by the redeemed. This morning, in preparation for communion, I want to focus on verse 9-10, but I think it would be helpful to consider the details that surround this passage.

I. Aids for understanding Chp 5. First of all, thematically and experientially, chapter 4 and 5 are one unit. But before John gets to that chapter he makes clear the **purpose of the entire book of Revelation**. John the Apostle is writing this epistle to the Church represented as seven churches. He is writing to commend the churches that are being faithful, correct the churches that are not honoring their responsibilities, and preparing the churches for what was going to take place. All in all, the bottom line is that Jesus Christ is in control of all things. The churches, though marred in sin or struggling with persecution, will join the company of the redeemed in heaven, and all evil will finally be eradicated. What more can we say of these churches in **chapters 1-3**? These were actual churches in the region, but as we can discern from the exhortations to the churches, these churches are representative of the kinds of churches that exist today.

Where was John when he received this vision and what did he see? John says that he was on the Island of Patmos, **Rev. 1:9**, when he received this revelation from God. The Island is located near modern day Turkey, in the Aegean Sea. During John's time the Island was used as a prison for Rome. So John is on an island prison. In **chapter 1** John uses Old Testament language to describe how he was able to understand the vision, He said He was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day; the Lord's Day being a reference to the day distinguished by the early church as the day of worship. There John describes an encounter He has with the resurrected Jesus Christ, and the consequent response, he fell on his face like a dead man **1:17**. Jesus Christ had to give Him strength so that John could receive the vision.

As a tip for filtering through testimonies of visions and experiences with God, this stands as an acid test. Though not everyone recounts this kind of fear and dread, dropping to their face in fear after seeing God and the glorified Christ is the most common response we can see in the N.T. and O.T. Every other response of Christian people in the N.T. seeing the exalted Christ recounts the strength He gave them for greater faithfulness, but there is solemnity about the experience (i.e. **Acts 23:11**). We would be wise to heed Christ's warnings in **Matt 24:23-26**. John needed the supernatural strength of God to experience the vision of Christ and the subsequent work Christ was about to extend.

Then John recounts what he hears from Jesus For His church. The first three chapters are warnings and encouragements to those who identify with Christ. That Christians need to heed Jesus Christ is underscored throughout the scriptures, here is the Apostle Peter's charge, **ESV 1Pe 4:17-18** ¹⁷ "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" ¹⁸ And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" What we see in chapter 4 opens is a view of heaven. It is a place of absolute praise and adoration of God. Its description is like the expression we have in **Isaiah 6** and **Ezekiel 1-2**. Beauty, power and authority, incredible sounds, and abject worship are the descriptors of heaven in all of these chapters. Into this John the prisoner is introduced.

II. He who is worthy. John moves our attention to specific events within the court of God when He opens **chapter 5**. He notes that in all that wonder a scroll with seven seals was brought forward, and a mighty angel called for search to be made for one who could open the scroll. Just as a point of help, when you read the number 7 in the scriptures in reference to God and His worship, the number has to do with **completion, or perfection**. So the seven churches are not just actual churches, but they represent the complete body of Christ visible, that is, on earth. The seven seals represent a complete, or perfect, work. In **verse 6** God joins this number of completion to highlight another symbol in scripture, horns and eyes. In apocalyptic, prophetic, and narrative biblical literature, horns can speak allegorically of strength, and eyes similarly speak symbolically of penetrating vision and perception. (*He who has eyes to see, let him see.*) So Jesus is declared to be equal in power and perspective. How is

He declared to be such? Please notice that while God is enthroned and being worshipped, the moment Jesus Christ steps forward at God's right hand to take the scroll every created being in heaven worships Jesus Christ in the presence of God. God does not allow anyone other than Himself to be worshipped. The last time anyone other than God was worshipped in heaven, the one who received worship, and those that worshipped, were cast out of heaven. Such was Lucifer when he was cast out and is not the great deceiver of men. Why is that important to the narrative? Beyond the declaration of Christ's equality with the Father, ***it is important because it makes the one who sees all things perfectly also the one who unleashed perfect judgment upon His Church and the world, and no one will stand in His path.***

Consider what John communicates to us. In **verse 2**, the angel calls for one who is worthy to open the scroll. A Search is made in the spiritual and physical realms, and no one is found worthy to open the scroll. John overwhelmed by this begins to weep loudly. The word for "weeping" is the same word that describes the wailing of a mother who lost her only son in the Gospel of Luke. It is the same word that describes Peter's response after he denied Jesus three times, and then caught the bloodied stare of Christ. This scroll and the surrounding activities held such gravitas that John the Apostle is brought to sobbing. But he is quieted by one of the elders worshipping God. What words does He use? **The Lion of the Tribe of Judah**, the **Root of David** has conquered so that he can open the scroll. ***These are references to the covenantal promises of God to David.*** These promises, in the extent God meant them, could only be fulfilled by Christ. This is the only place in **Revelation** that Jesus is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. John introduced now the term that would describe Jesus **more than 25 times** in **Revelation, verse 6**, a Lamb as though He had been slain. Just as soon as Jesus Christ takes the scroll song ensues in heaven. As the 24 elders hold up the prayers of every believer who has lived in this earth, they sing a new song. The angels watch and later join in proclamation of God's glory.

Worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals. For you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God: Who is included in this redemptive work? People from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation are part of this group who have understood the rescuing power of Christ's ransoming work. But not only are we ransomed from something, we are ransomed to something. We are ransomed from sin, and we are ransomed to a position and a purpose. We are ransomed so that we might be made a kingdom of Priests to our God to reign upon the earth. What do priest do? Priests live in the court of God. They have access to God. They commune with God. They lead in worship of God. We are ransomed from sin so that we might live in the presence of He whose very glory demands the choirs of heaven to sing in constant praise. John is about to distinguish unprecedented peril to the world because of sin, and he is being led by God to remind people who are ransomed by the blood of Christ to encourage them that Jesus Christ is in control, that Jesus Christ is accomplishing His work of redemption and will consummate His promises.

.III. The appropriate response to the glory of Jesus Christ. Here is a short list of responses that are appropriate for what we have just seen. 1. Worship **verse 13-14**. 2. **1 Peter 1:18-20**, recognize the cost of Christ's sacrifice and love what Christ loves, His Father and His church, and all those angelic beings who love God and His Son Jesus Christ. 3. **Phil 1:27**, work worthily of the Gospel and be sacrificial and humble as Christ was. 4. **Rom 12**, commit our lives to God as a sacrifice to Him by revealing Christ and serving others, especially the body of Christ. 5. Philemon, treat those who serve you in the gospel freedom Christ has shown you. There is not one aspect of our lives that isn't affected by, and leveraged for, the glory of Jesus Christ. 6. **1 Cor 11**, do not take the Lord's Supper in vain. The Lord's Supper is out opportunity to do on earth what happens in heaven. We declare His amazing sacrifice. We incline our hearts and minds in worship of the one who alone is worthy to be praised. We repent of our sin as members of the church of Jesus Christ so that we do not participate in an unworthy manner, and treat the sacrifice of Christ as a common thing. So brothers and sisters in Christ, let us prepare our hearts and enter into the same glorious worship that captivated John the Apostle. Jesus Christ alone is worthy of praise. May He be our song, our mediation, our proclamation all the days of our lives, both now and forever more. Amen.