

Unwrapping the Scroll

Revelation 5

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Last week we talked about what happens “after this” — after all the confusion of the seven churches that we’ve been speaking on, after all their struggles and the seven-fold challenge to conquer. “After this” (Revelation 4:1) John sees a door open in Heaven. He looks through it, and everything is worshipping.

Last week we preached that the first thing, maybe the only thing, is worship. To conquer, one must first be conquered. *Worship*. We must let go of our need to understand in order to know.

Revelation 4:8 . . . *day and night they never cease to sing, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, “Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”*

The scene is about *all things*. God is worthy because He created *all things*.

And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

John sees a scroll in the strong right hand of God Almighty. It’s written on the front and the back . . . no more space . . . nothing more to be said, it would seem. It is sealed with seven seals. In that day, when a legal document was written, six or seven witnesses would witness the writing of the document.

Then they would take the scroll and wrap seven strings around the scroll and drip wax over the knots on each string and the seam of the scroll. The witnesses would then take signet rings and press them into the wax on the scroll, sealing the document.

Some have speculated that *this* document—this scroll—is a legal document—a last will and testament—to those who inherit the kingdom at the death of the Testator, God’s Son. Maybe the seven seals are stamped with the seven-fold

Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth, who bears witness to Jesus and the Father.

Some have suggested that maybe the scroll is the Old Testament and the New Testament—all of Scripture. Some have postulated that the scroll is the Lamb's Book of Life, the names of all those who are saved. Some argue that it is, in fact, the rest of The Revelation.

I think that it is all of those things, and more. All Heaven worshipping God for all things — creation.

This scroll seems to pertain to all things. It's loaded with the words of God; in Greek, the "Logoi" of God. Logoi means "meanings"—words—of God. That's what words do: give meanings to events. These are the words of the Creator, the author of all things. I believe this scroll is the meanings of all reality. And it's sealed.

We have creation with a sealed meaning. A strong angel cries, **"Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"** In other words, "Who is worthy to declare meaning to all reality?" And *no one* in all creation answers. Even God the Father is silent.

He is worthy, for He created all things. But who is worthy to declare meaning to all things? John begins weeping ("wailing" in the Greek), the activity of absolute despair. It's the weeping of one who looks into the abyss of Hell.

He's not just weeping because he's curious about what's in the scroll. He's not just weeping because he'll never know about the ten-nation, European confederacy, the black helicopters, and the drama of the "left behind." He's weeping because life has no meaning. And *John* has no meaning. And the Church's struggle has no meaning. Everything is absurd; there is no point to the struggle in the churches; there is no conquering.

In Smyrna they are devoured by beasts in the coliseum, while Romans look on and cheer. They are tied to stakes and burned alive. John rots on Patmos, and it *has no meaning* . . . no logos.

John weeps the tears
Of a fallen world
Cut off from the light of life.

In the words of Bertrand Russell at the end of his life, "I have nothing to hang onto but grim, unyielding despair." Creation without meaning. All things without meaning. Pantos without logos. All pictures and no words. Events without story.

The last story I read a couple weeks ago was The Horse and His Boy out of the

Narnia series. (I had lost my copy of the book, so I bought another copy.) It's about Shasta, an abused boy raised by a wicked father.

Shasta runs away and tries to get to Narnia. But over and over he encounters troubles, just like the rest of his life. He has a litany of woes, not least of which is encountering so many lions in his journeys. He calls himself "the most unfortunate boy that ever lived." And you would agree, except that all those events happened in a *storybook* — a scroll.

John weeps because no one can open the scroll and read the story. The boy Shasta weeps in his story because the character in his story doesn't *know* he's in a story, and he cannot read his own story!

Events without story,
Suffering without meaning,
Pictures without words.

You rightly say, "**Well, *my* life is not some fairytale storybook on some shelf somewhere.**"

A few months ago a wonderful friend of mine came to see my wife Susan and me. At one point she shared some pictures from her life. Horrifying pictures. Worse than any fairytale story *I've* ever read.

Like Shasta, she was an abused child raised by a wicked father. I won't share all the pictures with you, but one picture was this:

One Halloween night long ago her mother dressed her up as an angel in a little white robe, wings, and a halo. My friend was thrilled because she had always wanted to be an angel on Halloween night.

Her father saw her and was furious. After trick-of-treating he took her to a meeting where people performed rituals . . . stripped her . . . put her on a table . . . molested her.

People come to pastors and want us to give story to the events of their lives. They want us to give meaning to suffering and words to pictures. I can't unwrap that scroll. Peter Hiett cannot tell her her story. I'm not worthy.

John was weeping and I've tasted his tears. They were tears of despair.

Then one of the elders said to me, "Weep not; lo [behold], the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." And between [in the midst of] the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God

sent out into all the earth; and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; [that's you and me!] and they sang a new song, saying,

*“Worthy art thou to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for thou wast slain and by thy blood
didst ransom men for God
from every tribe and tongue and
people and nation,
and hast made them a kingdom and
priests to our God,
and they shall [or “do,” depending
on your translation] reign on earth.”*

John looks and sees an “arnion,” a little lamb. But this little lamb has seven horns. **It's all-powerful. It has seven eyes. It's all-seeing; all-knowing. And the eyes *are* the seven-fold Spirit of God sent out into all the earth. And all Heaven worships this little lamb like they do God.**

God the Father is there, worthy through creation. And God the Son—the Lamb—is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals. And God the Spirit is seven-fold, emanating from the Father and the Son. The Trinity is *all there!* The Lamb is handed the scroll because He has conquered.

After all the confusion of the seven churches,
After the seven-fold are called to conquer,
After John weeps before
the seven-fold Spirit of God,
The elder says to John,
“Weep not! Stop weeping!”

This is how it appears in the Greek: “Conquered has the Lion.” Perfect tense, completed action with continuing impact.

Conquered has the Lion of the tribe of Judah. And John looks and sees a slain little lamb that he knows from the references that are stated . . . Messiah, Son of Man, suffering servant, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb of God. All these confusing, irreconcilable, mysterious, transcendent figures that the Jews had wondered about for thousands of years all at once imploded into this one little lamb bleeding on the throne.

Among the twenty-four elders (the people of God) He is worthy to unwrap the scroll. “For he [God] has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1).

“In him all things hold together” (Colossians 1). Through Him and the blood of His cross all things are reconciled to God.

In Revelation 19 we find out that His name is The Word—The Logos—of God. John writes first in his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”

The Word—
The Logos—
The Meaning—

. . . takes hold of the Logoi of God and prepares to declare meaning to all creation. *All things*.

The Revelation has suffered so at the hands of people like us, who make it exclusively about small things like the fall of Jerusalem or the drama of those left behind or our dislike of the United Nations. I’m sure it’s about all those, but it’s about so much more! **It’s about all things and every creature. That means it’s about you.**

Remember that. We get caught up in the trivialities of nuclear war, global economy, and world history, and we miss what’s truly great. For *all* power and *all* knowledge belong to the little Lamb on the throne who conquers *all* things by His death. He died in love.

He is the one who opens the scrolls of history.
He is the one who opens the scroll of your life.
He is the one worthy to open that scroll.

Why is that? Is it because He’s all-powerful? Is it because He’s all-knowing? According to the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fallen down before His throne, it’s because He has bled for you . . . ransomed you. So He is worthy.

If you line me up in a line with George Bush and Albert Einstein (power and knowledge), and then you ask my kids, “Who do you want to be your daddy?” do you know who they’d pick every time? Me. Why? Because I’ve bled for them. I’m the one worthy to give their lives meaning and to tell them who they are.

When they were little, they would come running for me to kiss their “owies.” (I remember one night at church Elizabeth fell on her bottom, and that led to an embarrassing moment . . .)

One night my friend was there who did not have children. One of my kids came running up to me saying, “Kiss it, kiss it,” and I kissed it, and they ran away happy, laughing. My friend turned to me and said, “That’s weird. They act like you *actually* heal their wounds.” I *did*.

Same pain but baptized pain. An entirely different meaning. In a little way Christ uses me to unwrap their scroll. I declare to them the knowledge of good and evil. I say, “Elizabeth, you’re fine.” And she runs off happy.

Jesus is worthy to open your scroll, a scroll of knowledge and understanding. In the Garden we stole fruit from the tree of knowledge. In the end we killed Jesus on the very tree of knowledge, I think, because we wanted to understand all things more than we wanted to know the maker of all things.

Knowing Jesus, walking back into the Paradise Garden, like we preached last week, we must be willing to surrender that fruit. Yet knowing Jesus we find out that He *feeds* us with that fruit in grace.

Fruit that once worked death because we stole it . . . knowledge of ourselves without God . . . horror . . . now that fruit is life. Knowledge of all things and knowledge of ourselves as gifts through Christ and in Christ.

We can’t understand
 in order to know or capture Him;
We know Him by grace,
 and He makes us understand.

He unwraps the scroll. Then all our understanding is no longer pride but worship. We can’t unwrap the scroll, but we know the one who does.

My friend sat in my office after we had prayed against some horrific spiritual entities and saw God’s incredible powers. She said, “I’m still haunted by pictures . . . in my dreams . . . wherever I go.” For her they meant shame, fear, and despair.

I have to tell you her pictures have confused me. I feel such compassion for my friend. I love my friend, yet I’m entirely unable to explain or comprehend. I’m not worthy. I’ve hardly ever suffered. Who am *I* to try to unwrap that scroll? I get confused, and I get angry with Jesus. But where else can I go? I feel like Peter in John 6 when he said, “For you, Jesus, have the words of eternal life.”

So we will eat His body and drink His blood. We will commune. I can’t unwrap

my friend's scroll, but I know who can.

We prayed, having battled a long time. And my friend had a vision—a revelation—an apocalypse of Jesus, as she had before. While we were praying she told me what was happening in the visions.

It was clear in those visions that all her sufferings are His. He cries her tears. He wears her blood. He aches her aches. He is worthy to unwrap her scroll.

In a vision she prayed, “Jesus, hold me.” I was thinking, “Jesus please hold her.” And He wouldn't. That confused me. Then He said, “You have to give me those pictures.” She was thoroughly ashamed to show these pictures to the glorious Lion of the tribe of Judah.

I prayed, “Jesus, please show her who she is and how You see her.” Jesus said to her, “Those pictures are part of who you are.” I thought to myself, “Is it really Jesus? **Surely Jesus would hold her! Surely Jesus wouldn't say that *those* pictures were part of who she is!**”

We kept praying, surrendering pictures. Each time she would give the picture to Jesus in the vision, we would pray He would reveal truth, and each time she would have another vision. Jesus would appear in the picture, and His presence in the picture would be like light shining in the darkness, entirely changing its meaning. **Lies would vanish in the light of eternity.**

I hope you caught this: Right before the Lamb opens the scroll and declares meaning to all reality, Logos to all history, story to all events, he smells something.

It's your prayers and my prayers and my friend's prayers, our prayers spoken in faith in space and time and the confusion of this world. They rise before the eternal throne of God as He gives meaning to all reality. **When God the Father spoke words into the darkness and said, “Let there be light,”** He was smelling your prayers.

When God the Son unwrapped the scroll declaring meaning to all past, present, and future, He smells your prayers. You saints of God reign on earth whether you know it or not! “For He always,” writes Paul, “leads us in triumph.”

We prayed through many pictures. She told me about one final picture . . . Halloween night, the coven, the angel outfit, the evil men, her wicked father. We prayed and, like the others, we gave the picture to Jesus.

Then she saw reality. She said Jesus entered the picture furious. He was furious like a rider with eyes of fire on a white horse. He went over to that wretched table

and picked her up and began to dress her in a white robe.

Jesus put the angel costume back on her. Then He set her on His lap and held her tightly. He rocked her back and forth and said, "I'm sorry this had to happen." He told her how He hurt for her. He told her how He had fought *so hard* for her. The Prince of glory fighting for her. Then He said this: "You are and you will always be my little angel."

She told me all this, and then it hit me. I said to my friend, "**Hey, hey! He is holding you! And He is telling you who you are!**" She just started weeping for joy. And Jesus told her, "Your pictures are my pictures."

You see, those pictures are *their* pictures.

When He holds my friend,
He holds *all* of her.
When He saved her,
He saved *all* of her.
When He gives meaning to the scroll,
He gives meaning to *all* the scroll,
past, present, and future.

And get this: my friend's vision is only a glimpse of what we all, children of God, are to believe right now in faith before we see it. That is, that Jesus is gospel meaning to every breath you take.

My friend looked at me after a while and with tears in her eyes she said, "How do you think it makes God feel when we are ashamed of those pictures?" I said something like, "I guess that means we're ashamed of Him."

If you gave your life *to* Him your life is *His* life. Maybe I should say *His* life is *Your* life. He suffered first. But whatever the case, we are His body, and our scroll *is* His scroll. He is unwrapping the scroll of history, that's for sure. But when we worship and surrender our lives to Him, we find that He is also unwrapping the scroll of our lives . . . or should I say the scroll of *His* life? In the words of Jeanne Guyon the mystic:

The revelation you receive will come to you as reality [that is, your life] . . . This is the way it was in the life of Paul. He did not ponder the sufferings of Christ; he did not consider the marks of suffering on the Lord's body. Instead, Paul bore in his own body the experiences of his Lord. He even said, "I bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ."

Jesus Christ had personally imprinted Himself upon Paul. "To live is Christ," wrote Paul. And maybe he actually *meant* this: "It is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me."

Logos in me.
Meaning in me.
Glory in me.

So your life is *not* some fairytale book on some shelf somewhere. Your life is a fairytale book in the strong right hand of God Almighty as He sits on the throne. The Lion of the tribe of Judah has seized hold of that scroll and is beginning to read that book to you. *Your story.*

In Lewis' fairytale The Horse and His Boy, Shasta, the unluckiest boy in the whole world, towards the end of the book finds himself in one more disaster. He is walking down a narrow path through woods in which he has never been. He is lost and confused. It's dark, and he's alone. He begins weeping as he walks, recounting all his woes and troubles, the unluckiest boy in all the world.

As he is walking, weeping, and talking into the darkness, suddenly he senses somebody is next to him. He feels a breath on his arm. He realizes that whatever it is, it is *huge*. He cannot escape from it; he cannot run. He is terrified.

Finally he whispers, "Who are you?" And he hears, "One who has waited long for you to speak." Shasta is terrorized and says, "Oh, I am the most unlucky person in all the whole world." And the Voice says, "Tell me your sorrows." And Shasta does. He unloads all of his sorrows, his litany of woes.

"I do not call you unfortunate," said the Large Voice.

"Don't you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?" said Shasta.

"There was only one lion," said the Voice. . . . "I was the lion." And as Shasta gaped with open mouth and said nothing, the Voice continued. "I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you."

"Then it was you who wounded Aravis?"

"It was I."

"But what for?"

"Child," said the Voice, "I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own."

"Who *are* you?" asked Shasta.

"Myself," said the Voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook; and again "Myself," loud and clear and gay; and then the third time "Myself," whispered so softly you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed

to come from all round you as if the leaves rustled with it.

Shasta was no longer afraid that the Voice belonged to something that would eat him, nor that it was the voice of a ghost. But a new and different sort of trembling came over him.

In the words of last week's sermon, "He trembled like an old pirate captured by the moon."

That trembling is called worship. Shasta's heart was being conquered. He was waking up to the glories of Aslan, the Great Lion, son of the emperor from over the sea.

Children of God, *you* are waking up to the glories of the Great Lion of the tribe of Judah, Son of God. Behold that Lion; behold, He is the Lamb slain for love. He is the Lord of love working everywhere in this world, and when you surrender your scroll you begin to see Him. He gives meaning to your past.

Paul wrote, "I forget what lies behind," but he didn't forget the *events* of what lay behind; he had just listed them. What does he forget? — their *meaning*.

**They no longer mean shame;
they mean glory and wonder.**

The Lion changes the meaning of your past; He changes the meaning of your present. Instead of confusion it's revelation and wonder and worship and faith that looks like obedience. Instead of anxiety in the future, He changes the meaning into delirious hope.

Shasta in the story turns out to be the prince.

My friend in the little angel outfit, in reality, turns out to be and always was the Bride of Christ, clothed in white. But now because she has seen the abyss, because she has taken a particular glimpse of Hell, she understands the Lamb of God and the love of God and the glory of God in a way that no one else in all creation does. An entirely new song.

She is, in the words of Paul, a "hypervikomen." **That means "super conqueror" . . . "hyper conqueror."**

"In all things," wrote Paul, "God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."

"And in all these things I am convinced," he writes, "that through him who loved us we are hypervikomen"— **super conquerors! hyper conquers! more than conquerors!**

Jesus said to my friend in her vision, “I want to use these pictures for my purposes.” The little girl in the angel outfit **conquers! Through her the Lion of the great tribe of Judah is proclaiming to the principalities and powers** the glory of the kingdom of God.

Can I tell you something weird? I didn’t say this at any of the other services, and some of you are not going to believe this, but I want to share it.

Last night before I got up to preach this sermon (this is weird — I married into this — my wife sees things), my wife said, “Peter, there is an angel standing on that little hill out there.” And I could tell she was shaken up. I thought, “Whatever.”

We sang some more, and then she bent down again and said, “Peter, the angel is holding a little lamb!” I thought, “Whatever,” and I got up to preach. After preaching I sat back down, and she was really messed up now. She said, “Peter, while you were preaching, angels walked through the walls and stood all around the sanctuary, especially right around you.” I thought, “Whatever . . . that’s my wife.”

Then she went and talked to someone else here last night who said, “Did you see what I saw?” Susan said, “Yeah.” They both saw it.

You can do what you want with that. What they said to me was, “We think all those angels were sent because the Enemy was so mad about what you were saying.” I have another theory. I think all those angels came to listen to the story of the little girl in the angel outfit, because she declares the glory of the Lamb of God.

And angels long to look into our salvation, and they listen with wonder. The principalities and powers in the heavenly places, the evil ones, shudder with fear. For the little Lamb that bleeds on the throne is the one who breaks down the doors of Hell and conquers everything. **He says at the end, “Behold, I make all things new.”**

And now I dare you to believe what John sees next. I cannot explain it, but it’s the truth.

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, “To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!” And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and

worshiped.

The new song conquers everything! If it has already conquered you, you can begin to sing it right now. Worthy is the Lamb. Amen.

[Music — “Worthy is the Lamb”]

If you’ve never surrendered your life to the Lamb who sits on the throne, Jesus the Christ, God the Father through the power of His Holy Spirit, I’m not *asking* you, I’m *telling* you: In the name of God Almighty, for this is His commandment, says John, *live*.

His commandment is eternal life. And *you* thought He just wanted to get you to stop *doing* something. He wants you to live! **He commands you to live!** Surrender your life. Lose your life, and He gives you life.

You tried to search for meaning in things, and it wasn’t there, was it?

You tried to search for meaning in what you could do and accomplish, and it wasn’t there, was it?

You tried to search for meaning in what this world says about you, and it wasn’t there, was it?

Meaning is sitting on the throne of God bleeding for you. Give your life to Him right now.

[Prayer]

If you prayed with me, I want to tell you that God smelled it as He spoke into the darkness saying, “Let there be light.” And now that light shines in you. You’re just barely beginning to see, so have patience but believe He loves you.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.