

Sometimes, things don't go as planned. You get ready in the morning and go into the kitchen to get breakfast. There you discover your pet has been sick in the night. So instead of your usual routine, you have to deal with that. Or one of the kids can't find an important piece of homework which leads to a crisis situation. There's no milk for breakfast. So a child or your husband is now cranky because they can't have their Fruit Loops. Eventually, you get out the door to see it snowed a lot more than you thought. You realize getting to work or school or getting the kids out the door will take a lot longer. You're day has gone off the rails and you wonder what else might happen.

Yet all these examples are pretty minor compared to some of the derailments we experience in life. You thought you'd be at that job until you retired. They laid you off. You thought you'd be in that relationship forever. Then they broke up with you or cheated on you. You had all these plans of what you wanted to do in life. Then the diagnosis came that changed everything. You jumped in to some exciting yet demanding challenge. You thought it would go in this direction. But it went that way. You thought your kids would turn out like this and they turned out like that. You thought your parents would be together forever and they got divorced. Life brings derailments.

Where is God when our lives take a different direction than we planned? What is He doing? Does He even see what's happening or care? These questions can come to us when life goes off the rails. Yet I'm here to tell you today that our God is the ultimate expert when it comes to derailment. He's dealt with derailed lives, derailed churches, derailed nations and a derailed world. He's the one who can bring good out of the chaos of derailment. Today we are going to see what He provided to deal with a derailment that threatened all of humankind. His provision for that derailment points to where we must turn with the derailments in our lives.

We discover this as John the author of Revelation continues to describe the second vision he received from the Lord. Jesus told him to "Write therefore, the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this," (Rev. 1:19). Then Jesus invited John into heaven to "come up here and I will show you what must take place after this." John saw a vision of the Lord God Almighty seated on His throne. John that he will now see what will happen in the end times.

But a problem arises that threatens to derail everything. It deeply affects John to the point of inconsolable weeping. What is this derailment? How will it be resolved? In the next phase of John's vision in heaven, we come upon this history

threatening derailment. If it is not addressed, it will leave John and the rest of us without hope for the future and for our lives. My prayer today is that we will first grasp the depth of this problem. Then gain assurance and hope for our future because of God's astonishing solution.

Revelation 5 (ESV)

5 Then 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. **2** And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" **3** And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, **4** and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. **5** And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; 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."

6 And between 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. **7** And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. **8** 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 golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. **9** And they sang a new song, saying,

"Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth."

11 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, **12** 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!"

13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

The Problem – Revelation 5:1-4

The vision that started in Revelation 4 continues into chapter 5. John has seen the one seated on throne with 4 living creatures and 24 Elders surrounding the throne. This one is the Holy Lord God Almighty. John attempts to describe the brilliance and beauty of God that emanates from His throne. John describes how the four living creatures and 24 Elders worship the Lord God Almighty.

But now in chapter 5, John sees a scroll in God's right hand. The word for scroll in Greek is "Biblion" from which we get our word "Bible." It refers to the books of that time. But they didn't have books like we have today. Their books were actually scrolls. Papyrus scrolls dominated the writing market. They made papyrus sheets by tearing the plant into strips. They laid one layer of strips vertically or up and down. Then you would lay another set of strips horizontally. Then you'd apply glue to the keep the strips all together. When it dried you had a papyrus sheet. To preserve these sheets, they would roll them into scrolls.

Usually, you only wrote on one side of the scroll – the side where the strips went horizontal. You could more easily write on the horizontal strips than going against the grain of the up and down ones. But some would write both sides if the inside of the scroll was not big enough for all the writer had to write. Now we might say, "Why wouldn't you just get another piece of papyrus?" We're used to buying 500 sheets of paper for a couple dollars. But papyrus was quite expensive. So they had to be very careful with the amount of sheets they used. John describes the scroll in God's hand as having writing on both sides maybe indicating a lot of info that needs unveiling.

John also notes that the scroll is sealed with seven seals. We put paper letters in envelopes and then seal them by licking the glue on the envelope flap. The only one authorized to open the envelope is the one to whom it is addressed. But they didn't have envelopes. So they would roll up their papyrus sheet into a scroll. Then they tied it with a piece of thread. If it was a very important document, the sender would apply their seal of wax on the string. They would drop hot wax on the string. Then the sender would seal the wax with their signet or signature ring. So if the seal was broken, the receiver knew someone had opened the scroll. For really important documents, the senders applied multiple strings and seals. These added credibility to the document and ensured only those worthy to break the seals of could open it. John tells us this scroll had seven seals. So it was a very important scroll. John immediately seems to recognize that the contents of this scroll will set in motion what must take place after this.

Therefore someone qualified has to be found to break the seals and open the scroll. John suddenly sees a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” That would be a pretty standard question if a messenger arrived in a town with an important document. The town officials would check to see who sealed it. Then they would determine who had the authority to break the seals and read the contents. But this scroll did not arrive in a town. It is held by the ruler of the universe. So the mighty angel calls out to the entire universe seeking someone worthy to open the scroll and break its seals. Notice the angel does not ask who knows how to open a scroll or who has the skill to open it. The angel asks “who is worthy” implying the right character and qualifications.

Verse 3 brings the devastating news. “And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and look into it.” No one in heaven could open the scroll in God’s hand. The four living creatures couldn’t open it. The 24 Elders weren’t qualified to break the seals. Michael and Gabriel, the archangels couldn’t open it. Nor could anyone living on the earth at that time open it. John wasn’t qualified. Nor was the emperor or any other earthly king. Nor could anyone who had already died open the scroll. Not Adam or Eve; not Abraham, the father of the Israelites. Not Moses the founder of the nation. Not Enoch who went directly to God nor the prophet Elijah who was caught up in a chariot of fire. Not David Israel’s greatest king nor Esther the Persian queen who rescued her people. Not Mary Jesus’ mother nor Peter the head of the apostles. No one in heaven, on earth or in time past was able to open the scroll and break the seal.

So here’s the problem. Here’s the earth shattering derailment. **No one in the universe is found who is worthy to open the scroll or look into it.** We might say to that, “So what? So no one can open God’s scroll in heaven. That doesn’t affect those living today and facing trouble. This is just some dramatic problem in a vision. It has nothing to do with us.”

But look at how John responded. Verse 4. “And I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look into it.” Some Bible translations say John wept and wept. So it’s almost like inconsolable weeping. When do we weep loudly? We would likely do that if there was a sudden and devastating tragedy or some horrible news or we experienced some deep loss.

Why was John weeping loudly? Well I don’t think it was because he got mad because he might not get his curiosity about future events satisfied. “Oh, I’m not going to find out who the antichrist so I can brag to my finds. Waaah. Waaah.” No. He realizes that if no one can open that scroll, we have no hope.

Were this scroll to remain unopened, it would be cause for permanent and continuous weeping. There would be no hope for oppressed peoples. There would be no final justice. There would be no calling to account of those who got away with their crimes. There would be no resurrection. There would be no vindication for those who have been wronged. There would be no fulfillment of the promises of eternal life and reign. There would be no completion of history – no coming to a conclusion – the world would just cycle on and on. John seems to understand that someone has to open this scroll to provide real hope and fulfillment of God’s promises. But at that moment, no one is found.

I wondered why Jesus let it get to this point? Why couldn’t verse 5 immediately follow verse 3? “No one could be found but look whose coming.” I think maybe Jesus allowed this to happen to impress upon John and all his readers the hopelessness of the future without someone worthy to open the scroll. We humans have this amazing tendency to think of ourselves as capable to solve any question or problem posed in the universe. But no human and no angel can open this scroll. So John weeps and weeps. But then he is informed of the astonishing solution.

The Astonishing Solution – Revelation 5:5-7

One of the 24 Elders brings words of comfort to John. Verse 5 – “Weep no more; 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.” Someone is worthy to open the scroll. He is a Lion – the king of the animals. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Israel had 12 tribes that came from 12 sons. Judah was one of Israel’s sons. When the person Israel also known as Jacob, blessed his sons back in Genesis 49, he had this to say about Judah. “Judah is a lion’s cub, from the prey my son, you have gone up. He stooped down. He crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?” From this came the messianic expectation that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. The Elder also notes this Lion was “the root of David.” This could mean he was the source of Israel’s greatest king or a descendent of David. Many expected the Messiah to come from the line of David. The Elder also states the Lion has conquered. Therefore, he is worthy to open the scroll and break its seven seals. This all sounds very good. The Elder tells John to look, behold, for a Lion who has conquered coming from the root of David. So we would all expect a Lion like figure to show up.

But look at what shows up in verse 6. “And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing as though it had been slain.” A Lamb? Lambs are not powerful. They come from sheep the primary animal that serves as the opposite of a predator. Sheep are weak before lions. Lambs are the weakest of the

sheep. This is a dramatic stunning unexpected appearance. We can miss its significance because we are so used to Jesus portrayed as the Lamb.

But listen to what commentators say about this moment. “In perhaps the most mind-wrenching rebirth of images in literature, the vision John receives and describes is not what anyone would expect.” Another writes “The shock of the reversal discloses the central mystery of the Apocalypse: God overcomes the world not through a show of force but through the suffering and death of Jesus, the faithful witness.” The same author writes “It is crucial that we recognize the contrast between what John hears and what he sees. He hears that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, had conquered. These titles evoke a strong militaristic and nationalistic image of the Messiah of David as conqueror of the nations, destroying the enemies of God’s people. . . But this image is reinterpreted by what John sees: the Lamb whose sacrificial death has redeemed people from all nations. By putting the two contrasting images together, John has forged a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death.” I would say that a little differently. I don’t think John came up with this idea. I think John just described what he heard and saw. God came up with this.

Still another writes “It is striking and unexpected to have a Lamb chosen to symbolize Christ. ‘None but an inspired composer of heavenly visions would ever have thought of it. When earth-bound humans want symbols of power they conjure up mighty beasts and birds of prey. Russia elevates the bear, Britain the lion, France the tiger, the United States the eagle—all of them ravenous. It is only the Kingdom of Heaven that would dare to use as its symbol of might, not the Lion for which John was looking but the helpless Lamb, and at that, a slain lamb.’

Revelation 5:6 is a critical verse in Revelation. The first four and a half chapters lead up to it. Then everything afterward flows from it. John uses the word Lamb 28 times in Revelation. It draws on the image of the Passover Lamb from Exodus 12 whose blood protected the Israelite firstborn. It also draws from the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who is led like a lamb to the slaughter. It is the central and centering image of Revelation – a slaughtered Lamb; a crucified Lord.

Yet this Lamb is not weak. The Lamb stands while the Elders are seated. The Lamb has seven horns a symbol of perfect power. The Lamb has seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. John expects a powerful Lion. Instead he sees a Lamb standing while bearing the scars of sacrifice. This is none other than Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world. Only He is worthy to take the scroll and break the seals. Only He is

worthy to bring permanent and perfect hope to the oppressed. Only He will bring perfect justice. Only through Him can we hope to find life beyond the grave.

Then the Lamb fulfills John's hopes. Verse 7. "And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne". The tenses of the verbs used show that the Lamb not only took the scroll but that He continues to hold it as if he reigns over what it contains. So the astonishing solution to the problem - **The slaughtered Lamb of God is worthy to take the scroll and rule over history's end.** His worthiness is absolutely unique in the whole universe. And His rule will extend over the end of history. He is the one who will pronounce and execute judgment. He will participate in the battle and win victory by the word of His mouth.

Heaven's Response – Revelation 5:8-14

Then heaven goes wild with worship. It doesn't wait for the seals to be broken and the scroll opened. The four living creatures and the 24 Elders immediately begin worshipping the Lamb. The Elders fall down before the Lamb while holding harps and golden bowls full of incense. It's like the Elders are priests who bring music of praise and offerings in their golden bowls. Yet we are told these golden bowls contain our prayers. Though despised by the world, the prayers of God's people enter into the very throne room of God. And these prayers are offered to the Lamb as if He is God. This would be another astonishing development for a first century Jewish reader. How could prayers be offered to anyone other than the Lord God Almighty unless this Lamb was somehow God?

They sing a new song. This moment is worthy of composition of a song to commemorate its significance. In the song they declare that the Lamb is worthy and why He's worthy. "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals. Why? "For you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." The Passover Lambs were slain in Egypt and their blood ransomed the first born of one nation. The Lamb was slain and by his blood He ransomed people from every possible nation.

He made them a kingdom of priests to God who shall reign on the earth. So here is more hope. Instead of tyrants and oppressors reigning on the earth, one day a kingdom of priests will reign. They (we) will not be out to oppress or exploit those they reign over. They will reign as God's servants with His heart.

Then the worship really picks up. John sees an innumerable number of angels. So whenever you think that God has 2 or 3 wimpy angels trying to make an impact while Satan has all kinds of demons running around, return to verses

like Revelation 5:11. This innumerable number of angels comes together in one voice to declare – “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive 7 expressions of wonder towards Him.” Power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!

But the worship does not end with the angels. All creation joins in. Verse 13 –= Every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth in the sea and all that is in them says – “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” Suddenly the reader of John’s vision are taught that it’s appropriate to offer worship to one who sits on the throne AND the Lamb at the same time. Worship is now directed not the achievement of the Lamb but to the persons on the throne. All creation gives off an enthusiastic outpouring of hearts full of adoration, love and praise to God and the Lamb. And the 4 living creatures say Amen – so be it. Yes! This is right! The 24 Elders fall down in worship. Heaven responds to the Lamb and the Lord God. How will we?

Our Response

First and foremost this passage calls forth **worship** from us. When people of faith become aware of who God is and what He does, they sing. Eugene Peterson writes “the act of worship rehearses in the present the end that lies ahead. Heaven is introduced into the present. It also conserves the past and so acts as a stabilizing force. . . . John’s vision shows that what congregations do presently in worship corresponds to what presently takes place in heaven.” I believe we also need to take note of the type of worship offered. It is joyful, enthusiastic and loud. Peterson writes “We must never forget the pictures of wildly celebrative praise in heaven and catastrophic woes wreaked on earth”. Worship pleasing to God includes joyous celebrations. If this seems too celebrative, are we really following the example of the worshippers in heaven?

This passage also calls us to **entrust ourselves completely to the Lamb**. We must come to Him amidst the derailment of our lives. We can identify with John in his weakness and weeping. We cannot take the scroll and break the seals. We are utterly dependent on a Savior. But we experience great relief with John at the Savior’s appearance. We can trust Him with our eternity and we can trust Him with whatever we face in life today. We need to keep from putting our hope too much in our knowledge, social connections and ability to plan. The reality is we are completely dependent on God for everything.

Remember Christ succeeded in accomplishing the most difficult requirement in all of history – a sacrificial death that paid for our sins. He is the only one in the universe throughout all time who could accomplish this. If He can accomplish that and is worthy to break the seals, He can certainly see us through whatever we're facing.

Finally calls us to **imitate His self-sacrifice**. Michael Gorman writes "The slaughtered Lamb reveals God and also reveals what it means to be faithful to God. It reveals how God saves humanity and how humanity can in turn serve God. Here John again echoes Paul for whom the cross symbolizes both the divine means of salvation and the human expression of that salvation in daily life. The cross is both the source and shape of our salvation." By Christ and Holy Spirit's power we are enabled to live a self-sacrificing life that overcomes the impact and influence of the enemy, sin, oppression, injustice and evil.

Jesus' absolutely unique worthiness looks after the end of history and our souls. We can entrust our entire lives and future to Him. He is trustworthy and all-powerful. Have you given the trust of your life to Jesus? Have you put all your trust upon Him and none on yourself? He was slaughtered so that you could come to God. His self-sacrifice opens the door for you. It paid the cost for your sins and invites you to fellowship intimately with the One True God. Let us come together now and worship the Lamb.