

Searching for a Hero! // Revelation 4:9–5:14 // Revelation #6e¹

Intro

If you have your Bibles this weekend, open them to **Revelation 4...**
(move to chair)

As we get deeper into the book of Revelation, it's important to remember the context into which John is writing. The church in John's day was struggling. Confused. (START SPINNING). They're like, *"Jesus, when you ascended into heaven you said all power and authority was given unto you; you told us to ask and you would give us the nations as our inheritance; to ask that our joy may be full..."*

Let's let "***" represent John's audience.**² "Jesus, we prayed for you to deliver us from Nero and you finally did but then Domitian came to power and none of us saw that coming and things have only gotten worse. And my friend Mark got sick and I asked you to heal him but you didn't--he died; and the church I got saved in, the Jerusalem church, got totally wiped out by persecution and then the new church I go to, Pergamum--we went through a nasty split, and then some of leaders fell away from the faith. And I'm trying to STAND FOR YOU, Jesus..." (STAND UP!--Can't). This is the church in John's day. (Some of you got messed up just watching that).

¹ Sources consulted: Tim Chester, *Revelation for You: Seeing History from Heaven's Perspective* (London: The Good Book Company, 2019); Tim Keller, "Heavenly Worship", June 20, 1993, Redeemer Presbyterian; Louie Giglio, "The Song that Consumes All Other Praise", May 26, 2024, Passion Church; Jen Wilkin, "The Heavenly Throne Room", Session 3 of Revelation: Eternal King, Everlasting Kingdom Bible Study, July 1, 2024; Matt Chandler, "Your Ultimate Reality", Session 2 of The

What John wants to do is give them—these confused, struggling, disoriented churches—a fixed reference point that restores balance to their lives and gives them power to endure suffering.

Pastor Curtis showed us last week that Revelation 4 opens with a door opened in heaven and an invitation to John to "come up here." John, and us, are being invited to take a peak at what's going on on earth through heaven's eyes.

Remember, we opened Revelation with a **vision of the Powerful One** giving the revelation to John (that was **Revelation 1**); then we **listened to specific counsel** Jesus had for 7 churches at the time, counsel that applies to churches in every era (**that was chapters 2–3**). **Now, in chapter 4**, John turns his focus to the things that will "soon take place"--which was, if you recall, Jesus' purpose for the book, to give us a "**revelation of things that must soon take place**"--and that starts with the revealing of a **mysterious scroll sealed with 7 judgments**.

Before John tells us what those judgments are, however, he wants to show us what's happening in heaven as these judgments are unveiled on earth, and so he invites us to come up to heaven and take a look--and when we walk through heaven's door, we walk in **on a worship service**.

4:6: The participants in this worship service are the 24 elders, which Pastor Curtis told us last week most likely represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles--symbolizing the totality of the people of

Overcomers Bible Study of the Book of Revelation, rightnow Media and Harper Christian Resources, May 7, 2024; Dr. Conway Edwards, "[Whose Throne Are You Living For?](#)", October 28, 2023, One Community Church; Skip Heitzig, "[The Rapture: What and When](#)", May 7, 2023, Calvary Church. And others as noted throughout.

² This is Conway Edwards' illustration of spinning someone to where they can't stand up.

God from both Old and New Testaments--12 tribes of Israel (OT); 12 Apostles (NT).

- In other words, John is seeing the whole, united people of God from both Old and New Testaments worshiping together.
- (And y'all, what a moment that will be, right? I mean, can you imagine what it will be like worshiping with King David and Samson and Ruth on your right hand and Adoniram Judson, Corrie Ten Boom and Tim Keller on your left?)

The other participants in this worship service are the 4 living creatures (vs 6), and scholars tell us they represent the entirety of the created order--the heavens, the earth, the animal kingdom, and all of humanity--also united in praise to God.

Which I want to use to make 2 initial points: **(1) It all ends in worship.**

When it's all said and done, and we finally see everything from heaven's perspective, we'll worship. This is John's fixed reference point that makes everything stop spinning. What will overwhelm us, when we look at things from THERE, is how a GOOD GOD was in control of all of it, weaving it all together for his good plan.

- Listen: **There are 14 worship songs in Revelation** (which is 2 sets of 7; 7 being the number of perfection, of course); **5 of those 14 songs are in chapters 4-5.**³
- **All of those songs are about God's faithfulness to his plan**, and they read like this one in **4:8**:

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

- "Holy," as Pastor Curtis showed us last week, means perfect; without flaw." Saying it 3x is like saying, "perfect, perfect,

perfect;" there was not one spot of breakdown in God's goodness or plan.

- **And sometimes, Summit, it just helps me to go THERE**, and see it from there, because it doesn't always FEEL right now like God and all his ways are perfect; but, see, I know that when I finally see things from heaven's perspective, when my faith is finally made sight, I'll see that God had a good and perfect plan and that not one part of his good plan was left unfulfilled. And then I, along with all the rest of God's people, when we finally see it, will have no recourse but to worship.
- It's **kind of like when we were studying some of the Psalms** this past Christmas, and we looked at a couple of the Psalms where the Psalmist was complaining, almost despairing-- You remember this? Psalm 88, Psalm 89: "God, where are you?" "God, I don't understand you. God, why don't you fix this?"
 - I told you that it was an **irony** that the book of Psalms is called "Psalms," because "psalms" means "praises" but the majority of the psalms feel like complaints. In fact, Eugene Peterson asks, "Is it false advertising to call this book 'Praises' when the book contains so much about pain, doubt, and trouble?" Is this like putting a fake, attractive smile on the cover of a book about sadness?⁴
 - **Peterson answers his own question, "No, it's not false advertising... because the last 5 Psalms, Psalm 146-150 are all unbroken praise. You won't find one complaint in there.** Once you get to Psalm 146, all the questions and confusion and doubt go away, and everything crescendos into unbroken, unfiltered praise.
 - And what it's doing is giving you a picture of this Revelation 4-5 moment in heaven! Eugene Peterson says: **"The title of**

³ 4:8; 4:11; 5:9-10; 5:12; 5:13

⁴ Hermann Gunkel, a Hebrew scholar, said that 'the prayer of complaint was the backbone of the Psalter.'

the book ("Psalms," or "Praises") is accurate because it accurately describes the end, the finished product. After all these psalm-prayers complete their long travels through the unmapped back countries of pain, doubt, and trouble, with only occasional vistas of the sunlit lands along the way (that's called 'life'), they finally pull back into the station of praise... ***All prayer, pursued far enough, becomes praise.*** All prayer, pursued for long enough, becomes praise.

- And, like I said, sometimes, Summit Church, it just helps me to go THERE--up there, right now, by faith--to remind myself that the song I'll sing in heaven, the song I'll sing when I look backwards from eternity, is not, "Why, God?" or "How long, God?" or "How come you didn't, God?" It's just the song of unbroken praise.
 - Nero's not in charge. Cancer's not in charge. Depression is not in charge. Your unreasonable boss is not in charge. *JESUS* is in charge.
 - **And all those prayers I prayed where I felt like nobody was listening... God was listening. In fact, there's a great image here, chapter 5:8,** (flip over there for a minute), there's this moment when the 24 elders fall down in worship, they have in their hands ***"...golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."*** These are all these prayers that Old and New Testament saints (us!) have prayed over the years... prayers for healing and for justice and for salvation and revival and for prodigals to come home--for NC State to win a championship in *something*--and some of them felt like they never got answered. But God heard every one and has collected every single of them in a bowl and there's coming a time when he fulfills them all (in his own way, yes, but not one of them goes unanswered, not one of them was ignored or unheard.)

- I can't remember if I've told you this, so if I have, forgive me: But a couple of years ago I spoke at one of our church plants, Two Cities in Winston-Salem, NC. The church is just a handful of years old, but it's growing and blowing. It's got several thousand people now; people getting saved and baptized. It's like a New Testament revival. You might know I grew up in Winston-Salem... I got saved when I was 16 and I was a brand new Christian and full of zeal... my church wasn't growing. People weren't getting saved. At one time, it had been like 1500 people and it was down to 3 or 400. So, my best friend and I decided we were going to get to church an hour early each week and pray for revival. So we came to church an hour before Sunday School each week and just prayed FOR REVIVAL. And I was so full of childlike, expectant faith; every week I got up thinking, "This week is the week! This is the week the fire is gonna fall." No one was more excited for the service each week than me. "It's going to happen this week." (I was more excited about the pastor's sermon than he was...)

And every week, nothing. And I remember being really disappointed--like, *"God, why? I mean, I'm asking something good. It's not selfish. I'm asking for revival."* But every week, business as usual; same unresponsive service.

Eventually I graduated high school and went off to college. It wasn't like a crisis of faith or anything, but I did wonder, "God, why didn't you hear me?" But eventually I forgot & moved on.

Fast forward 30 years--I'm standing on the stage at Two Cities. Multiple services; people standing wall to wall. I open the Bible to start to preach, and as I look out I see all these young people; there's even people I grew up with from my home church. From the front door of that church you can see the area where my home church sits. And just before I start to preach, the Holy Spirit whispers into my heart, ***"I heard you."*** I

hadn't thought about this in 30 years. But he just said out of nowhere, *"You thought no one was listening. I heard every word."*

- ...Saints, I'm telling you, **there's coming a moment when we'll see he did that *with everything!***
- **All prayer, pursued far enough, becomes praise.**
- And, like I said, sometimes it just helps me to go there, to by faith walk through that open door and join in anticipation of that moment when my faith is made sight and I unite with that heavenly group in eternity saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"
- *My praise is a weapon; it's more than a sound. My praise is a weapon, my enemies drown in.* And the world stops spinning.

So, this scene in heaven shows us that worship is **where it's all headed, and it also shows us that (2) Worship is what we're created for**. That's the point of the 4 living creatures who represent the whole created order being present in this service. It's a picturesque way of saying the ultimate point of all of creation is worship. God created everything he created for worship.

I've told you before: If the only purpose for this universe is to create a habitation for man, it's kind of excessive, right?

- **The week before last Veronica and I were out in Colorado speaking at a marriage retreat** and one of the guys I got to know at the retreat was a retired NFL running back from the Chicago Bears who had won all these awards--he held several NFL records, he'd been on the all-American rookie team. Kind of built like me but a little shorter. Just kidding. If a Sherman Tank could become a human being, that's what this guy would look like. Anyway, we were taking a hike through this thing called "The Garden of the Gods" out there, which is this place where all these rock formations jut up out the ground; it like the shelf of the earth's plate cracked and just sticks up into the sky several hundred feet,

and in these gigantic structures you can see all these layers of rock--you're looking at several hundred feet of the earth's crust, and this former NFL star said, 'Man, this place just really makes you feel small, doesn't it?' And I said, "Bro, just standing next to you makes me feel small... You and I have had different experiences as human beings.' But he was right. The biggest people in the world feel small next to something like that.

- And then it hit me that what I was looking at was, relatively speaking, just a few feet of the earth's crust--and there were miles and miles more of that kind of rock strata beneath my feet, and we're on one small, rather insignificant planet in a mediocre sized galaxy. They say that if the Milky Way Galaxy were the size of the United States, our solar system would only be the size of a quarter. And there are 2 trillion other galaxies in our universe like the Milky Way, each containing billions and billions of stars.
- The vast majority of energy in the universe put out by these stars is wasted. Our sun, I've told you, puts out is equivalent to over a trillion nuclear bombs every second, and they say our planet benefits from only **0.000000045%** of that energy (meaning that 99.999999955% of the energy is wasted). And there are stars out there putting out millions of times more the amount of energy than our sun puts out--Like UY Scuti, which they say is about 1,700 times the size of our Sun. (*UY Scuti is a cool name for a star, right? If I was a rapper, I'd want that to be my rap name: UY Scuti.*) They say that if UY Scuti sat where our sun sat, its outer edge would extend past Jupiter. It puts out millions of times more energy than our sun does--and apparently to no end--as far as we can tell, there's no life that these stars sustain.
- Now, we look at all that and say, "Well, if the whole point of creation was to create a habitation for man, there seems to be a lot of waste." And yeah, if creating a habitation for man is the main point of the universe, there is a lot of waste. But, if creation's real purpose, main purpose, is to give us a glimpse of the glory of God--well then, I'd say it's just about the right size.

None of that energy or space is wasted, because all of it exists to testify about God.

And see, that's the secret to understanding yourself. **You were created for worship.** You are wired to stand in awe of, and give glory to, something far bigger than yourself. You're hardwired for that. You can no more turn off your drive for worship by not being religious than you can turn off your sex drive by remaining single. That's not how it works. You're created for worship; you'll find something to worship.

The whole tragic history of the human race is basically the story of us trying to find something beside God to make our object of worship. You can explain so much of our lives as quests of worship.

- Some people choose **earthly greatness**. They want to build a legacy or create a name that will be remembered. They want to have their name hung in the rafters. Earthly greatness is the thing they've given their lives for.
- Some people choose **family**: family is everything to them. That's their primary 'bigger purpose.'
- Even things like sex or other physical pleasures can be seen as worship quests. The British philosopher **Malcolm Muggeridge** (who, I know, sounds like a Harry Potter character) described sex as "the mysticism of the materialist." G.K. Chesterton said that many men who knock on the door of a brothel are really in search of God. **Sex is not the answer**, Josh McDowell said; in many ways, **it's the question**. That what we are doing in here when we come together on the weekend, on a soul level, is what many people are doing through things like that.

You're created with a yearning deep inside of you to live for something greater than yourself--you cannot turn that off, it's how you're made--and that yearning is an echo of something your Creator put into you, your heart will always be unsatisfied until you locate your worship in him. As Christian counselor **Ed Welch** says,

"SPIRITUAL needs are not a part of our humanity; they are the center of it." That's the secret to understanding yourself!

And so, in this opening scene in heaven, what we see is all of God's redeemed people, and all of creation, consumed in worship.

BTW, sometimes people get thrown off scenes like this because they think, "Well, is this all we're going to do in heaven? Like heaven is one big, long, choir concert where all we do is stand in a crowd and sing?" And you're scared to say it, because you feel unspiritual, but you're like, "I mean, that sounds like it could get a little boring. Right?" You're like, "I love a good worship service, but sometimes it feels like the worship leader just keeps going on and I'm like, 'OK, bro we're done, let's wrap it up...'" And you're like, "Is that what heaven's going to be like--one never-ending worship service?"

No, **the Bible tells us there are lots of other things we do in heaven, and** these pictures are metaphors--they just mean that in all that we do, celebrating and rejoicing in the glory of God, whether we're singing in worship, or whether we're eating or drinking or working, or whatever else we do up there, awe of God and the glory of God will be the core.

So, in this opening scene of heaven, we see that they are worshipping. But John does more than simply show us *that* they're worshipping; he also shows us *why* they are worshipping. There are **TWO reasons**: the 1st I'll just mention briefly since we've already seen it a couple of times in Revelation:

A. The Father's Control (Chps 4–5)

There are 17 references to God's throne in Rev 4–5, which is significant given that there are only 61 total references to the throne of God in the entirety of the New Testament. 45 of those 61

references are in Revelation, and 17 of them are concentrated right here in these 2 chapters. **The point being emphasized in these chapters is that God is in charge. He's on the throne.**⁵

Like I said, I'm just going to mention this since Pastor Curtis covered it so much last week, but rest assured that even when it feels like life is spinning out of control, God is on the throne, and when you finally see things from his perspective, you'll say with all of creation and all of God's people, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

But here's the second thing that makes them worship, ch 5:

B. The Son's Salvation (Ch 5)

Chapter 5 opens with a problem: **1 Then (John said) 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.**

Our 1st question, of course, is what is inside this mysterious scroll?

John's **original audience in the 1st century would have recognized** a scroll described like this as a kind of legal document--when a scroll was written on both sides, rolled up and sealed up with seals, that meant it was something like a last will and testament.

⁵ The one who sits on the throne, John says (4:3), has the appearance of jasper and cornelian, which should make your Old Testament alarm go off, and if you look up "jasper and cornelian" in your Old Testament, you'll see

This is **the title deed to the earth**, the earth as God intended it to be.

- **A world of beauty...** creation without all the natural disasters, a world without tornadoes and tsunamis and tarantulas and floods and most of all, without CATS
- **A world of... justice:** where the strong can't exploit the weak. Where rights are protected. Where there is no abuse or war or prejudice.
- **A world of... family and relational harmony:** A world without divorce or arguments or estranged children or alienated friendships.
- **A world without addiction...** a world without the bondage of sin.
- A world without **death** or **disease** or **destruction**

In short, the world we've always wanted; the world **God has always wanted** to give us. But **John weeps**, because **no one can be found worthy** to open the scroll and gain this inheritance!

- **Imagine a really wealthy woman who had died and left behind her entire fortune** for her family, but she'd stipulated in her will that the only one who could execute the will had to meet a certain set of criteria: They had to be a blood relative; and they had to have demonstrated an unquestionable commitment to the family, which means there can be no record of them ever saying anything negative about the family or her; they also had to have demonstrated no greed, which means they can never have expressed any desire for her money to anyone else; they also had to have written, visited and called this woman faithfully every week leading up to her death; and, to boot, they have won at least one Nobel prize and be able to run a 4-minute mile. And as the family hears all these stipulations being read **they** realize that

that in the breastplate of precious stones that the High Priest wore, cornelian (also called 'sardius') was the first stone and jasper was the last. Exodus 28:15–21. This is another Alpha-Omega reference. God started it all, and will end it all, and thus he's the one in control of the middle too.

nobody meets the criteria and none of the riches will ever be theirs!

- That's **similar to what is happening here**.

John looks down through the annals of history for someone who meets the criteria to open the scroll and gain this world and finds... **NO ONE**.

Why? Because the **7 seals** that seal the scroll are God's judgment against sin--and every member of the human race ever born is guilty of sin and worthy of these judgments. No one ever born can save the human race; they couldn't even make it through the first seal.

- **Listen, this won't surprise many of you**, but I grew up loving superhero stories: Superman. Spiderman. Batman. The Shazam. The old school kind where when they'd punch someone and on the screen it would say, "Ka-Pow" or "Ker-splatt." Remember these?
- But I've noticed that there has been a recent **development in superhero stories**--I feel like this started to happen when I was a teenager--**more and more often heroes are presented as flawed characters with demons of their own**.
 - They may have super human strength, but they also have **super-blind spots. And super-dysfunction**.
 - They are **corruptible**.
 - Many have called this "**the rise of the 'anti-hero'**."
 - It's **like we have a hard time presenting anyone, even fictional characters**, as entirely good.
- **Let me ask: Why do you think that is?** And **what does it say** about the culture that produces stories like this?
- It probably reveals that **a lot of us feel let down by** those we thought were good; those we depended on for help.
 - **It seems like every day** we hear about some trusted figure, some religious leader, or some cultural icon or political figure who turns out **not to be** what they presented themselves to be.

- **We love the concept of royalty**--some of you watched *The Crown* like it was a story about your in-laws--but we know any honest history of royalty is filled with tyranny and injustice.
- I'm not **saying there are no trustable leaders** in the world--I'm just saying that when you get close to any human leader, you find out they have flaws.
- And that **leaves us with a dilemma**: any would-be-savior in the world can't overcome the one problem humans need to overcome: the curse of sin.
 - **I think I've told you this before**, but it's the true story about the grandmother who was left to watch her **2-year-old** grandson and somehow he got away from her for a few minutes and then she looked out the window to see him, to her horror, stumble into the deep end of the family pool. She ran out in desperation to save him and jumped in after him... and 3 hours later the EMT's pulled out the bodies of the grandmother and grandson because she couldn't swim either. It's a tragic, heartbreaking story--but the point is that the **person doing the saving** can't have the same problem as the one who needs to be saved.
 - John looked down through the annals of history and saw that there was no one--literally no one who was able to save the human race from its sin.
- **You say, "Well, what about John? I mean, he's an Apostle of Jesus for crying out loud, and he's literally been tortured by being boiled in oil and remained faithful. He's "the one that Jesus loved." Can't he do it?**
 - No, I imagine **John probably realized about himself** what I have realized about myself, that **no one has disappointed me** more than me.
 - No one has **lied to**, or **made false promises** to, me more than me.

- The **more I know myself**, the less impressed I am with me (My wife and I celebrate 25 years of marriage this week, and she loves me and our relationship is better than ever, but I'm sure somewhere she just shouted 'Amen!' When people are impressed with me because I'm up here on stage, she's just like, "Oh, you should try living with the fool.")
- Listen, like you, I **want a world of peace and harmony**, a place with no more tears, but then I think of how many times in my life I've caused tears through my selfishness or thoughtlessness or even cruelty, and I think, if heaven's going to have no more tears, how can I get in there, given how many tears I've caused throughout my life?

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole? Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll? 4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

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 center of the throne,

- What John sees is **confusing**. He hears about a lion, but when he looks, what he sees is a lamb. (PIC) And don't think "mighty ram," lamb--*Go Heels!*--think a small, helpless lamb.
 - In fact, the **normal word for "lamb"** in the New Testament is **amnos**, but here the word used is **arnion**, which specifically means little or pet lamb.
- **This is a small, weak, helpless looking creature; and, even more than that**, this lamb 'looks as if it had been slain'--meaning that the lamb bears the marks of abuse and suffering. **The Lord Jesus**, who, though he was the Son of God, the very one at the center of the throne, came to earth not as a lion but as a lamb, lived as a servant, and died in weakness under Rome's oppression.

- Now, John hastens to add, the fact he's a suffering lamb doesn't mean he lacked power. In fact, vs 6 of chapter 5 says that this lamb had "seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." We're not meant to read that literally like this is some kind of grotesque mutant lamb with strange eyes and horns. **No...**
 - **"Horns" in the Bible symbolize power**, and 7 is the number of completion. So, having 7 horns means he has all power.
 - **"Eyes" symbolize omniscience and omnipresence**: So, having 7 eyes means that this Lamb is the all seeing, all knowing, and (through the seven spirits, which again, is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit), he is the ever present God on earth.
- **He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah**, and yet, what characterized this mighty lion while he was on earth was tenderness and weakness and humility and suffering.

Friend, HEAR THIS: This is the gospel: Jesus, the LION who sits on the throne of history, came to earth not as a Lion but as a Lamb, because he was coming not to dispense the judgment of God but to take it in our place.

- **You see, though he was sinless, on the cross, he experienced all 7 of these seal judgments** (We're not there yet; we're going to be getting more of these in chapters 6–8, but let me just walk you through them really quick):
 - The **1st 2 seals are oppression and war**: Jesus suffered an unjust imprisonment at the hands of occupying Roman soldiers
 - The **3rd Seal is famine**: on the cross, before he died, Jesus called out, "I thirst."
 - The **4th Seal is death**, and Jesus, though he was innocent, died a criminal's death.

- The **5th Seal is the cry of the martyrs**, cries of “despair” and the unanswered prayers of “how long, O Lord?” On the cross, Jesus cried out, ‘*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*’
- The **6th Seal is cosmic disturbances (a great earthquake, the sun turns black)**. On the cross, when Jesus died the sky went dark and there was a great earthquake.⁶
- The **7th Seal is a great silence in heaven**. When Jesus cried out from the cross, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ there was no response, only a great silence from heaven, and heaven stayed silent for 3 days until the resurrection.
- On the cross, Jesus literally **absorbed all 7 seals** in our place.
- The key word of the gospel is **SUBSTITUTION**.
 - A lot of times at TSC, we say you can **summarize the gospel in 4 words**. If you’re a Summit member, say it with me: **Jesus in my place**. That’s why everybody that gets baptized is wearing a shirt that says that. *He lived the life we should have lived, then died the death we’d been condemned to die. “He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities...”*
- And **because of that, see, HE can open the scroll. All the curses for all the sins we had committed that brought all of these plagues on the earth**, all these things that are contained in these scrolls, went into him and he put them away forever.

Friend, Jesus is the hero the human race has always yearned for--he’s the one who can give us the life we’ve always wanted; the life God intended for us. **And that’s what sends these 24 elders** (representing all the redeemed people of God) and these **4 living creatures** (representing all of creation), into raptures and ecstasies of worship.

⁶ Matthew 27:51, 45.

At the end of the day, God’s glory is not best demonstrated by his ability to create the heavens, as awesome as that was, but by his willingness to become weak, a servant, a sacrificial lamb who would let himself be slain so he could rescue a traitorous human race.

- **The early church father Gregory of Nazianzus** said that even the weakest flame (**small BIC lighter, small candle**) burns upward. This candle burns upward, but it won’t burn downward. The true strength of a flame (**torch**), **he says**, is shown by its ability to burn downward.
- God’s **true glory is shown not by how he created the expanse of the heavens or the brilliance of the stars, but by how he humbled himself**, by his ability to burn downward, how he took upon the form of a servant and suffered the shame and penalty of sin in the place of his people.

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So, when the elders see this, they fall down⁷--meaning, they are undone, and they cast their crowns at Jesus’ feet.

- Crowns, by the way, represent everything else we’ve ever boasted in throughout life... Our proudest accomplishments. What is that for you? Your intelligence. Your success. Your skill. Your grit. Your goodness. Your family. All of that, whatever that is, in that moment, feels worthless, because Jesus’ salvation was everything.

So, all the elders fall down and say, **“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”** (5:12) What he’s describing is a crown. “The crowns all belong to YOU!”

- Real power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing, righteousness, goodness--they all come as gifts from God.

⁷ 5:14

- The reason I'm here, Jesus, is not because of my goodness but your grace. I'm not here because I had the wisdom or righteousness or goodness to seek you, I'm here because you sought me. I would never have sought you had you not sought me first. You gave me understanding when I was foolish. Sight when I was blind. Righteousness when I was sinful. You are my righteousness, my hope, my sight, my peace, my strength, my goodness. All these things belong to you! The only thing I boast in is your grace.

So many of our songs focus on this moment:

*When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride...*

- All my crowns, all my accomplishments, I cast at his feet as worthless--
 - The church I grew
 - The books I wrote
 - Any name I think I acquired
 - Any righteousness I think I had
 - Any money you've amassed
 - The company you've built
 - The kids you've raised
- You cast all those crowns at Jesus' feet as worthless (at least in terms of accomplishment) knowing that every good thing was a gift of his grace. He was your righteousness when you were sinful; your life when you were dead; your goodness when you were evil.

Get this: the only purely man-made thing there in this scene around the throne that endures are the wounds of Jesus. Think about it, all true blessing and honor and glory and wisdom and righteousness come from him; what we contributed are his wounds. And those wounds only increase our worship. **Tony Evans tells the story** of a man and his wife out hiking one afternoon when they got caught in a terrible hailstorm. This was a massive hailstorm; one of those rare

storms where the hailstones were as large as baseballs. The man realized that if he didn't do something quickly, his wife might get seriously hurt or even killed. So, he draped himself around his wife, covering her with his own body so that the hailstones hit him instead of her.

He thought the hailstorm would only last a few seconds, but the hailstones seemed to just get bigger and bigger and come down harder and harder. After a few minutes, several spots on his head and back and arms were bleeding. He kept trying to get to cover, but he was so weakened by the onslaught that he finally laid his wife down and collapsed over her, only able to cover her body as the hailstones came down. Finally the storm ceased, and they both survived, but he was left with scars from where the hailstones had battered at him, scars that remain to this day.

On a local newscast recounting the story, the man's wife was asked how she felt about their experience. She said, *"Well, every time I see the scars, I love him more."*

In heaven, we'll all have perfected bodies, but there will be one body with scars, and those scars will forever remind us how he stood between the wrath of God and us, and those scars will make us love him even more. He's the worthy hero we've always been searching for; the one whose love is perfect; the one we can always depend on; the only who will never disappoint us or let us down. Because he's the lion of Judah, he's strong enough to save us, to overcome death. Because he's the lamb, he's humble and loving enough to do so, to bear our sin and shame. *Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or joy compose so rich a crown?* Has there ever been someone with that kind of strength and love united in one person? The flame of his strength was not shown by its ability to burn upward, but by its ability to burn downward. The hero we need is not someone who can bend steel or stop bullets, it's someone who can face death and bear sin.

And seeing that Savior there, at the center of that throne, draws forth our deepest love.

And so, the songwriter continues: *Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all!*

Or, *"We fall down, we lay our crowns, at the feet of Jesus! The greatness of (not my goodness or accomplishments, but the greatness of) his mercy and love, at the feet of Jesus; and we cry holy, holy, holy; holy, holy, holy; holy, holy, holy; holy, holy, holy is the lamb."*

Is anyone able, Is anyone whole? Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll? The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave--he is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave. Is he worthy? Is he worthy? Of all blessing and honor and glory. Is he worthy of this? HE IS!

And so, **John ceases his weeping** and joins with those around the throne as ⁹...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."* (not only will there be believers from both the Old and New Testament eras there, but there will be people from every tribe and language and nations--Jews and Greeks and Babylonians and Mexicans and Africans and Americans and people from Sudan and Russia and India and Indonesia and Aborigines and American Indians--these are all represented in these 24 elders, united in worship around one glorious Savior, and we say) 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 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 (joining us now are

bands and bands and bands of angels, so large in number that they seem greater than the number of stars in the sky!), 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, (to him) 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.

This is what John sees; the vantage point he looks from, and this is what he knows will give the church the ability to press on; what they can fixate on when their world feels like it's spinning out of control.

When I was a kid, one of my favorite things to do was rub my feet on a carpet and then shock someone. Remember that? For Christians, rubbing up on this scene fills us with the power to endure suffering, TO resist temptation, and shock the world with Jesus' glory, generosity and grace. Want to know...?

Friend, this is the scene to focus on. The lamb is slain, the tomb is empty and the throne is occupied, so let's put our eyes on him and never take them off, Amen? Summit, let's join with those 24 elders and those 4 living creatures right now, can we? At all campuses, let's stand and sing this together, as Hank leads us...