

I've come to realize in life there are fundamentally two kinds of people: people who, when they are watching a movie are 100% focused and dialed in on the movie, and people who compulsively interrupt the movie. I grew up in a household that was entirely in the first category. The movie starts, and everyone is quiet for two hours until it is over. Then I get married and the person sitting next to me starts talking. I assume it's an emergency. I stop the show. Keren says, "Is that the same actress that's in *The Hunger Games*?" I can't express my level of confusion. Just watch the movie! A few minutes later, more talking: "Do you think the nextdoor neighbor did it?" How would I know? I don't know. Let's watch. "How do you think it's going to end?" If you are quiet, maybe we'll find out.

How many of you are movie talkers? How many of you get angry just thinking about those interruptions? I'm with you...but to Keren's credit, and to the credit of all the movie interrupters out there, as we continue our study of the book of Revelation today, we see that there is an interruption to the unfolding drama taking place in heaven. Right as the most beautiful and inspiring worship in all the Bible is taking place in chapter 4, we begin reading chapter 5 and we see that there is an abrupt interruption to the worship in heaven. We are going to read the entire chapter, then we'll work our way back through it and try to understand why it is so significant, and why this is broadly considered one of the greatest chapters in the entire Bible.

Then 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. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 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." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And 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. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Again, this is one of the most-loved and worshipful passages in all of Scripture. We'll go back through and look at three pillars of this chapter. We'll look at the scroll, the picture of a lion and the lamb, and then finally the worship songs that fill the halls of heaven.

Let's begin by talking about **the scroll**. Revelation 5 begins with these words: "Then 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." Who does this scroll belong to? It's in "the right hand of him who sat on the throne." God the Father is the one

who holds the scroll. It belongs to him. The scroll has writing on both sides, which means that it is chock full of content. We normally have margins on the border of all our printed and handwritten pages. Sometimes you look at a page and see scribbles and writing all around the edges; the author has filled up every square millimeter with content and information. That's what's happened here. But no one can read what is written on the scroll because it is sealed with seven seals. In the ancient world, sealing scrolls was what was done for documents of exceptional legal or financial importance. Today, we have time stamps, passwords, face ID, and cyber security, all to help ensure that a document is authentic and hasn't been tampered with. The ancients had wax seals. When a letter was completed, it was either rolled up or folded, and hot wax was pressed over the crease, so you knew if the wax hadn't been broken, no one had tampered with the document. A hand-delivered letter might have one seal to prove who it came from and that the person it was written to was the first person to open it. A bill, title, or deed might have two or three seals. But guess how many seals the most important document in the world, which was the last will and testament of the Roman emperor, had on it? Seven seals. Why is that? Think about what happened in our last election with the claims of voter fraud. Whether it happened or not, I am not going to weigh in on. You can go to Facebook for that. But because some people thought we had fraud and the wrong person was in power, we had a riot at our capital and suspicion over the election for three and a half years. The emperor didn't want that to happen, so he had his will sealed with seven seals. It could only be opened when all the people who witnessed the writing and completion of the document were present to certify the details.

Emperor Vespasian's scroll revealed who would lead the Roman Empire. That's not the information that the scroll in God's hand contained—that scroll contained God's plan to save the world, which makes it far and away, exponentially, a billion times more important than anything else that has ever been written. A few months ago, we had water damage in our basement. Our insurance company sent out an adjuster, they confirmed it was a covered cause, and then told me they would send a very large check in the mail. Usually I go to my mailbox once, maybe twice a week. I was going three times a day when I was expecting that check. I wanted to make sure that it came, and that I was the one who opened it. I was understandably eager. But can you imagine how much eagerness and excitement there was, not to open a mere check, but to open the scroll that was going to reveal and bring about God's plan to save the world? Everyone in heaven was on the edge of their seat, waiting with bated breath to hear what would happen next. "And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?'" (Revelation 5:2). We need to find the person who is worthy, we need someone who is qualified by his rank and capable by his strength to break the seals so the scroll can be opened and God's salvation can ensue. Here's where the crisis comes in: "But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it" (Revelation 5:3). Do you remember the movie *The Sword in the Stone*? The King of England died without an heir to the throne. His sword was firmly secured in an enchanted rock; no one besides the rightful future king could pull it out. Every man in the kingdom tried and failed. Without a king, the kingdom fell into disarray. That's what's happening in heaven. For salvation to come, someone has to be able to open the scroll. A search was made in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. No angelic being (in heaven), no person alive today (on earth), and no person who lived before that time (under the earth), was able.

So we see something very unexpected: there is crying in heaven, and not just a little tear welling up in the corner of the eye. John says, "I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside" (Revelation 5:4). Why is John weeping? If this scroll doesn't get opened, no one gets into the family of God. In Revelation 3:5, 20:12,15 and 21:27, we see that there is a book in heaven called "the Lamb's book of life." It contains the names of everyone who has placed their faith in Jesus and received eternal life. If this scroll in Revelation 5 doesn't get opened, no names make it into the Lamb's book of life. If no one can crack these seals and read the scroll, we are dead in our sins, under condemnation, and destined for hell. Hopeless doesn't even begin to describe it. So John weeps and

weeps and weeps. Then his weeping is interrupted, not by someone handing him a tissue but by an angel bringing him good news.

And now we see the second pillar of this chapter: the Lion and the Lamb. The hero of the story makes an appearance. “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’” (Revelation 5:5). The elder points and shows John a lion from the tribe of Judah. Our modern political parties have a donkey to represent the Democrats and an elephant to represent the Republicans. The Jewish people had the image of a lion to represent their Messiah. The lion was the leader God had promised throughout the Old Testament who would come and lead God’s people to victory. That’s what this lion has done: he has triumphed. The elder says no one else could open the scroll and save humanity, but the lion, the messiah God promised, can do it. So John looks, expecting to see a roaring lion, the most fearsome of all the animals, the king of the jungle, but rather than seeing sharp teeth and a flowing mane and rippling muscles, he sees something else: “Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders” (Revelation 5:6). Here we have the strangest and most unexpected of all sights. Instead of seeing a fearsome, imposing, indomitable sight, John sees a lamb that has been slaughtered but has come back to life. Here we learn the way in which Jesus, our Messiah, was able to triumph, the way he was able to bring salvation to the world: the lion became a sacrificial lamb. He was led to slaughter. The all-powerful God humbled himself to experience death, even death on a cross. When nations chose an animal to represent them, they chose animals of strength. Russia has the bear, India has a tiger, Indonesia has the Komodo dragon, we have the bald eagle—all these animals are fierce predators who convey power and strength. But those aren’t the images God chose. Jesus chose a lamb, because the way he ascended to his throne was not by slaughtering his enemies, but by surrendering to his enemies and willingly becoming a sacrifice, so that his blood could atone for the sins of the world. When people come to realize that the all-powerful God humbled himself and died on our behalf so we could live, the only proper response is worship.

That’s our third pillar: worship. When those in the throne room realize that Jesus is the one who can open the scroll and bring salvation to the world—because he died and rose again—all of heaven breaks out in praise. There are three different songs, and as we look at them. I want to give you five adjectives for the worship we see and hear in this chapter.

Fresh worship. I’m a guy who likes to eat bread most days. Most of the time I eat bread that was made several days earlier at a store, and that’s fine. Nothing wrong with that. But occasionally, Keren makes fresh bread. The store-bought and fresh breads have the same caloric and nutritional qualities, but there is something undeniably special when it’s fresh. The worship in heaven was fresh. Instead of singing the same songs they had always sung, “they sang a new song” (Revelation 5:9). Why are they singing a fresh, original, brand-new song in heaven? Because Jesus has done something new: he died, he rose again, he gained the victory, he won our salvation. Something new happened, so they sang a new song. We would be wise to follow suit, not only singing songs about that supreme work of grace that changed the course of eternity, but also bringing fresh worship to God whenever he provides new grace in our lives. After I got married, I worshiped God in a new way, thanking him for my wife. After I had children, I worshiped God in a new way, thanking him for my kids. A few days ago, I was mowing my yard and thinking about this church, about how much I love this church and all the incredible people who are here. I had tears of gratitude flowing down by cheeks. Whenever God pours out a new expression of grace in your life, bring him a new song of praise.

Joyful worship. The worship in heaven isn’t dull and drab, it is lively and energetic. “Each one [of the heavenly creatures] had a harp” (Revelation 5:8). When we think of a harp, we think of classical, slow, reflective music. An ancient harp was more like the modern banjo—it was energetic, pulsating, celebratory, and joyful. It got you stomping your feet and clapping your hands. Think about your favorite

concert of all time and multiply that by 10,000! That's the tone and quality of the singing. Worshiping God is full of joy!

Prayerful worship. The heavenly beings are not only playing a harp, "They were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people" (Revelation 5:8). The other day, Keren and I were passing by a Bath and Body Works store. I continued walking, unaware and unfazed. I looked back, and Keren was gone. The aroma had sucked her in. She was there for hours, tangled up in hand soaps and candles. Keren loves sweet smells. So does God. But it's not soaps and candles he enjoys most; it's the prayers of his people. Our prayers are brought to him and they fill the heavenly throne room like incense. God loves the aroma of our prayers. He receives our prayers as worship. There are many scholars who believe that the content of the prayers impacts the content of the scroll, that God's plan to save the world, as recorded in the scroll, grows and grows as God's people pray. Our prayers are not only pleasing and worshipful to God, but they also change the course of history and make an eternity-altering difference in people's lives.

Inclusive worship. I was watching a college football game last week, and right before kickoff they showed the singing of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. But instead of a typical rendition, with a local celebrity singing in front of a microphone, showing off their vocal range while 70,000 people stand and listen for this game they had the choir director for the university do that thing that choir directors do where he tells people when to start and when to stop, and he directed the entire stadium in singing along. That's what we see in heaven: there are some angels leading the way, but before long, everyone is in on the action:

- Four living creatures
- Twenty-four elders
- +100 million angels
- Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea.

It's almost like a song that starts out slow, with one instrument and one voice, then it slowly builds, adding another instrument, another voice, then another, then another, all the way up to the final crescendo where the entire ensemble is at full throttle and in complete unison. That's what's happening here until it includes every creature in the entire universe, the chorus of all creation.

One more quality of this worship: it not only includes absolutely everybody, it is very specifically **Christ-exalting worship**. In Revelation chapter 4, God the Father receives the praise because he is the creator of all. In Revelation 5, Jesus is praised, because he is the savior of all.

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. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever! (Revelation 5:9-10, 12-13)

All the worship in heaven now includes Jesus. Most of you know that we have three kids. If you came over to my house and you saw that we had hung up a family portrait that was clearly taken recently but only had two children in it, you'd probably be confused. Someone is clearly missing. You'd probably even be offended that we didn't put all our kids in our picture. The same is true for us in worship. Before Christ, we knew that God was one. Through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of

Jesus, and the filling of the Spirit, we know that God is not only one, he is three. So when we worship God, we give attention specifically to Jesus, and we exalt him, we praise him, we honor him, for who he is, and for what he has done to bring us into the family of God.

The most fitting thing to do at this moment is to worship, so let's stand and join in.