

“Worthy Is the Lamb”

Revelation 4-5

Last Saturday, Miguel Cabrera became just the 33rd member of the 3000-hit club in baseball history, hitting another opposite-field single early in the Detroit Tigers’ 13-0 win over the Colorado Rockies. Cabrera didn’t need to join the 3000 hit club to cement his status as a future Hall of Famer, having long since stamped his Cooperstown ticket with 500 home runs, a Triple Crown, multiple MVPs, four batting titles and more than a decade’s worth of All-Star nods. His latest accomplishment just adds to the fact that he’s worthy to be in the Hall of Fame.

That’s the key word in this section of the book of Revelation: worthy. Worthy, *axios* in Greek, means to bring into balance, to praise. And while we just heard the end, where we’re told that Jesus is worthy, that’s not how it starts.

We’re spending this Easter season looking at the book of Revelation. Last week, Pastor Mark went through the first three chapters of Revelation, which focuses on seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. Here in chapters 4 and 5, though, we start to get into the things that we stereotypically know about the book of Revelation. We start to see a vision of heaven. We start to get strange creatures and people in white robes. We start to get into the strange, mysterious, confusing imagery that makes Revelation famous, or infamous.

The challenge comes because of that strange imagery, the strange looking creatures and fantastical descriptions, which can obscure the wonderful message of hope we find here. When I first came to Ames, I led some internationals through a study called “Eight Bible Lessons for New Christians.” In the second lesson, we talked about the characteristics of God. One of the readings was from Revelation 4:8, when

John has a vision of God’s throne room in heaven. While the question in the study focused in on the words of the angels, that God is holy and powerful and was and is and is to come, that reading always caused distraction. The description of the creatures surrounding God’s throne, with six wings and full of eyes, always caused us to go off track. The students were always more interested in discussing what those creatures were than their message.

It’s not that those questions aren’t important. It’s not that knowing and learning about the details of Bible passages isn’t important. But it can be easy to get distracted by the details away from what’s going on.

What’s going on here as we begin to move into the next part of Revelation is that a question is asked. Who is worthy? Who is worthy to open a scroll? The question is not who is bold enough or who is strong enough or who is willing. The question is who is worthy, completely and fully qualified. At first, no one. No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth. No one is worthy. John bursts into tears at this. What can be done?

But then comes the good news. Jesus is worthy. Throughout Revelation, John refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God. It’s a striking image of the sacrifice God provides for the salvation of humanity. The brokenness of creation is revealed in the sacrifice of Jesus. And yet, in the midst of sorrow all of creation rejoices. We rejoice because in Christ’s death there is new life and salvation for all who believe! More than that, we rejoice because while none of us is worthy, yet God in his grace loves us, hears us, and answers our prayers. We are not worthy, but Jesus is.

Today is Confirmation Sunday. Some of you may remember your own confirmation. It used

to be more common to have some sort of questioning, to test those who would be confirmed to see if they had learned what they were supposed to. It was a way of seeing if they were worthy to be confirmed. Now, they get tested and taught in other ways.

But the point is not being worthy on their own. The point is that Jesus is worthy, and because Jesus is worthy, we are made worthy. The blood of Jesus has ransomed us, people from every tribe and language and people and nation. Jesus is worthy; we are not. Jesus was willing to go to any lengths to bring you near to God. And he did. The blood of Jesus covers your sin and makes you worthy in a way that no amount of good works or bargaining ever could. So regardless of what you have done or haven't done in life, regardless of your background, the only thing that makes you worthy is Jesus, trusting in Him.

Jesus is worthy because he was, and is, the slaughtered Lamb. This worth is attested to by the craziest collection of diverse creatures joined by the common characteristic of praise. By heaven's standard, there is nothing more remarkable and valuable than the free confession of gratitude by those who have suffered. By heaven's standard, the thing most highly valued as praiseworthy is the double confession that moves from admission of guilt to the expression of gratitude for the transfiguring grace of the resurrection.

Because Jesus is worthy, we can join in this song of praise. When we sing "This is the Feast" when we do setting one of the Divine Service from our hymnal, we sing this song of praise. Contemporary Christian singer songwriter Andrew Peterson wrote a song called, "Is He Worthy?" that was later covered by Chris Tomlin, based on this passage. He summarized this section by saying, "Revelation 5 contains one of the most beautiful and dramatic scenes in scripture, and is centered

around the question, "Is anyone worthy?" The resounding answer is, "Yes! And his name is Jesus."

The song of praise we hear today, that continues throughout the book of Revelation, never loses its thrill. That's because the one, the Lamb of whom we sing, is the only one who can claim such a feat, dying and rising again for us. The Lamb is then worthy to receive such words of praise. Jesus lives, never to die again.

Each week we gather for worship reminded of the fact that Jesus is not just another figure in history. He has made history. He has been raised from the dead. And each week we celebrate a mini resurrection acknowledging this great day, that the Lamb sits on the throne and is worthy. Because He lives, we too are made worthy, and one day we will join Him and all the heavenly chorus in singing, "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain...to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever. Amen!*"

As we go through life, we can feel lost and unworthy. We can feel like we aren't worthy to come close to God. That's when God comes to us. God the Father gives us all that we need. God the Son came into the world to show us the path to the Father, and continues to come to us in Holy Communion. God the Spirit comes when God's Word is read and proclaimed, when the waters of Baptism are splashed on a baby's head.

We may not get into the hall of fame. We may not always feel worthy of whatever honors we receive. But we know that Jesus is worthy, and has made us worthy to be with him. That's good news.

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