

# Christ is Lord of History

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Psalter 261

Read: Revelation 5

Text: Revelation 5:5–7

Psalter 3

Psalter 48:1–4

Psalter 200

The Lord Christ suffered His whole life, but, when considering His suffering, we think particularly of the spiritual and physical suffering He bore on the way to the cross and upon it. Knowing that these sufferings were to come, He asked of His Father, in Matthew 26:39, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” The idea of the suffering He would yet endure threatened to overwhelm Him, but He trusted His Father and said, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” He suffered when His friends betrayed Him. He suffered when both the church and the state put Him on trial. He suffered when the soldiers beat and mocked Him. He suffered the humiliation and physical pain of being executed on the cross. But above all, He suffered the pain of hell as He was engulfed in His Father’s wrath.

Jesus came to earth to suffer. Jesus said, “For this cause came I unto this hour” (John 12:27). He came to die, “for except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). In His suffering and death, He ransomed a people for Himself. He died so that, by glorifying Himself in the redemption of His people and in the condemnation of others, the decree of God could come to pass. Christ’s suffering was the vehicle for the fulfillment of the plan of God.

In Revelation 5, we have a heavenly view of the suffering of Christ and its effects. Our text is Revelation 5:5–7, and through it we will examine the first half of

the chapter. “And one of the elders saith unto me, weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.”

In this text we see that Jesus Christ is the Lord of history as the Lion who conquered, the Lamb who was slain, and the Lord who opens the book.

### **Christ is Lord of History as...**

1. the Lion who conquered
2. the Lamb who was slain
3. the Lord who opens the book

### **1. Jesus Christ is the Lord of history as the Lion who conquered.**

Our chapter opens with a crisis. No one is found worthy to open the book. The opening verses of our chapter (5:1–4) read, “And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.” The one sitting on the throne is God, and He has in His hand a book, or a scroll. The scroll details the rest of history. Chapters 6 and 7 unveil the contents of the scroll: the scroll contains all the prophecies, judgments, and happenings to come. This scroll “is written within and on the backside”; it is

written on both sides to show that the prophecy is full and complete.

But the crisis is this: there is no one worthy “to loose the seals thereof” (v. 2). Verse 3 says that no one anywhere in the whole universe is able to open the book. Why do you think no one was found to open the book? Does verse 4 say there was no one found who was smart enough? who was strong enough? who was pretty or handsome enough? No; verse 4 says, “no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.” What does it mean to be “found worthy”? Being found worthy means to be found sufficient for the task, being able to do it, or having enough value to do it. The same word is used by John the Baptist when he says, in John 1:27, “He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose,” and Paul uses the same word in 1 Timothy 5:18 when he says, “The labourer is worthy of his reward.”

Why was no one sufficient or valuable enough? Paul tells us in Romans 3. In Romans 3:12, he uses a word that is opposite of “worthy”: “unprofitable.” He says, “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one.” Paul is quoting two psalms. Psalm 14:3 says, “They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one,” and Psalm 53:3 says, “Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” The truth that no one is worthy and that we are all unprofitable and can do no good is so important that the Bible repeats it many times.

I trust we all believe in the doctrine of total depravity. We agree with the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 14, which says of man, “Being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from

God,” and the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 3, Q/A #8 which says, “Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness? Indeed, we are, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.”

You may agree with the truth of man’s depravity, but how do you respond to it? How do you respond to our unworthiness? Do you respond like the Apostle John in verse 4? “And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.” You may not shed actual tears like John, but does it grip you like it gripped John? Do you realize what it means that no one, not even you, is worthy? Has the reality struck you that the divine purpose of God for all things could not come to pass unless one was found who was worthy? Have you ever realized and felt that you, in Adam and by your own personal sins, are responsible for our being worthy of condemnation?

Praise be to the Lord that the book of Revelation does not end at verse 4 of chapter 5. Verse 5 says, “And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” It is as if the elder tells John, “Look, John; don’t cry; don’t despair; the Lion has come, and He is worthy because He has been victorious.” This Lion is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. Both these names, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” and “the Root of David,” are titles for the Messiah.

In verse 5, the Christ prevailing over all is the prominent idea. In the original, the word “prevailed” is placed before the two Messianic titles. The words of the elder highlight the prevailing, or the victory of the Lion. We could say that the elder tells John to look at the victorious Lion of the tribe of Judah and Root of David.

The Lion of the tribe of Judah is the prophesied

deliverer and promised king. In Genesis 49:9–10, when Jacob is blessing his sons, we read, “Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

He is also “the Root of David.” David was the warrior-king. David solidified the kingdom of Israel and took full possession of the Promised Land. The Lord blessed him and subdued all his enemies. In Revelation 22:16, we read, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.” In Isaiah 11:1–2, we read, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.”

Jesus Christ, the mighty King and Worthy One, has prevailed! He has come and He has won victory. No one has been found worthy but Him; He is worthy because He has prevailed.

It is to this worthy one that the elder directs the Apostle John. Amid his weeping at the hopelessness of the situation, John is directed to look at the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David. John knew he was not worthy. He knew no one was worthy except one: the Lord Jesus. It is to Jesus that the elder directs his attention—and it is to Jesus that we also must look.

If you have been gripped by the truth of the doctrine of total depravity, you know like John that no one is worthy; you must look to Christ. You can look nowhere else. You must look to the prophesied Messiah and the

promised King. He alone is worthy to open the seals. We are not worthy; it is our fault that sin and misery dominate this world. But Jesus Christ, the victorious Lion, has proven Himself to be the Lord of history. He alone is worthy to loose the seven seals so that the plan of God can continue to unfold. It is to the Lion that we must look.

John looks, and this brings us to our second point:

## **2. Jesus Christ is the Lord of history as the Lamb who was slain.**

John looks, and what does he see? In verse 6 we read, “And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain.” John does not see a Lion; he sees a Lamb—and not just a Lamb, but a Lamb standing after it had been slain.

The elder told John to look to the victorious Lion, but instead he sees a Lamb that has been killed, but is standing. What a mystery! John looks, and in the middle of everything, in the middle of the throne room, in the middle of the beasts, in the middle of the elders, where the Lion should be, stands a slain Lamb. Everything is focused on it. John sees the Lamb because the Lion prevailed as the Lamb. The Lion was found worthy because He was slain as the Lamb. The only way Jesus could be the Lion was to be the Lamb. The only way Jesus could conquer was to suffer.

Jesus was the Passover Lamb. He was slain in the place of sinners. But the slaying of the Lamb includes more than Jesus’ death on the cross. The slaying of the Lamb culminates in His death on the cross, but it also includes all the things He had to suffer on the way to the cross. Isaiah prophesied all He was to endure:

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised,

and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgement: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:3–12).

He suffered and He was slain. But John does not just see a slain Lamb; the Lamb is standing. The Lamb was dead but is now alive—a mystery. When an ani-

mal is killed, it can no longer stand; it has no life. But this Lamb that was slain is standing. The word for “standing” is active in contrast to the passive word for “slain.” The slain Lamb is alive.

How can this be? Because the slain Lamb is the Lord Jesus Christ; He is God Himself. Verse 6 continues to describe the Lamb. The Lamb has “seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” Throughout Scripture, the horn is a symbol of power, and the number seven is symbolic of fullness or perfection. The Lamb has all power. He can do all things. He is omnipotent. Jesus says in John 10:17–18, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” The Lamb has the power to lay down His life and take it; He can be slain and yet stand.

The Lamb not only has seven horns, but also “seven eyes.” The Lamb is not only all-powerful, but also all-knowing. The eyes represent knowledge, and seven, the number of perfection, is applied to the eyes as well. One of the main means for learning is by watching. When parents are trying to teach something, what do they usually say? They say, “Watch this” or “Look at me.” Imagine what you could learn if you could watch everything in the world, all over the world, at the same time! The seven eyes are another way of saying that the Lamb sees everything and knows everything.

Verse 6 continues. It specifies that these eyes are “the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth,” referring to Zechariah 3:9 and 4:10. Both passages refer to types of Christ and speak of seven eyes. “For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the



LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” The Spirits mentioned in conjunction with the eyes refer to, as the Puritan Thomas Goodwin put it, the “eyes of providence sent into the earth, by which he knows and sees all things.” The Lamb who was slain is the Lamb who can stand because He is God; He can do all things and He knows all things.

Do you know this mystery? Not the meaning of the words on this page, but the Lamb Himself. Do you know Him as the Suffering One who took the place of sinners? John cried out in the grip of his unworthiness, and the elder pointed him to the Lion, but he sees a Lamb.

Have you ever needed a Lion? You look at yourself, your feelings, your thoughts, or the struggles in your life: work, getting bills paid, keeping the farm going, a struggle with a particular child, or even getting all your homework done. You say, “Lord, I need a Lion to deliver me. I need a Lion to win the victory.” Sometimes we subtly focus on what we would have the Lord do and not on the Lord Himself. When you look to the Lion for the victory, do you see Him as the Lamb?

Is your focus on Him and not on yourself? Do you go to Him knowing He is worthy because He was slain? Because He is the Lord of history and He has done all things, you can be assured that, no matter what, He has your best interests in mind.

Believer, whom do you go to? Do you go to Christ and plead the promises? Do you plead on His person and on His work? Do you plead on the fact that He was slain? Do you plead on the fact that He stands? Do you plead on His eyes, and do you plead on His horns? You can trust that you will prevail because He has.

Perhaps you are concerned. You see your sin and you are afraid of the Lion. The only way you see the Lord is as a consuming fire. But when you look to Him and trust in Him, you will find a Lamb who was slain

for sin. He is slain but He stands. He stands with seven horns and seven eyes. He is very God of very God; He will accept you, not cast you out.

Perhaps all of this means nothing to you. You do not care about the Lord Jesus or what He has done. I warn you: He has prevailed, and you stand no chance against Him. If He is not your only hope, then you have no hope.

### **3. Jesus Christ is the Lord of history as the Lamb who opens the book.**

We have seen the great need in heaven. The Lion has prevailed. In turning to see the Lion, John sees the Lamb. The Lamb is worthy, so He takes the book. In verse 7, we read, “And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.” He takes the book from the right hand, the position of privilege, demonstrating that He is worthy and even equal to God the Father Himself.

The Lord Jesus Christ is now the Lord of all time and history, and all things are under His power and authority. In Matthew 28:18, we read that, upon completing His atoning work, Christ said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

1 Corinthians 15:27 states, “For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.” All things in heaven and earth, including all things to come, are now His. By the victorious suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ, history can continue to unfold—and it unfolds as His story.

What is your response to the great work of the Lord of history? The last half of Revelation chapter 5 demonstrates what our response should be: all of heaven and earth should bow before the slain Lamb and worship Him. This worship has two aspects. The first is humility. Verse 8 states, “And when he had taken the book,

the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb.” The elect angels and the church bow in humble reverence before the slain Lamb. None of the beasts or elders calls for the attention of the Lamb. None is asking for recognition of his service. There are no congratulations offered. There is only self-abasing, humble bowing before Him who is worthy.

The second aspect of their worship is confessing the greatness of the Lamb and what He has done in song. In verse 9, we are told that they sang “a new song.” They sang in praise to the Lamb, praising Him by proclaiming what the Lamb has done to conquer as a Lion. First, they confess what He can do and what He has done: “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain” (v. 9). Second, they confess the effects of what He has accomplished: “thou...hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (vv. 9–10). Third, all those in heaven confess the extent of His worthiness: “Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (v. 12). Finally, all those in heaven and earth give Him the praise He deserves: “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (v. 13).

The only fitting response to Jesus Christ, the Lord of history who alone is the Lion who conquered, the Lamb who was slain, and Lord who opens the book, is to humbly worship Him and confess the greatness of who He is and what He has done. May the Lord Himself give us repentance for not honoring Him as He deserves and the desire and strength to bow before Him.