

“Behind the Veil”
Revelation 5
Mr. Matthew Collins
January 5, 2020 • Evening Sermon

A few months ago my wife and I moved to Birmingham, Alabama from New Jersey to be a part of the pastoral fellowship program. We have loved our time here at Briarwood. We love the Christ-centered worship and how the Gospel is proclaimed here in many creative and artistic ways. We were blown away by the live nativity and the sheer vastness of it that Briarwood puts on every year over several days in early December. It is obvious that Briarwood has embraced the one crucial, all important teaching that is ‘go big or go home.’ Most churches are content with one manger scene but Briarwood does 14 live scenes that depict Jesus’ life, from His birth all the way to His resurrection. My wife and I were blessed to be a part of it this past year but there was one very important scene that was left out. That is the scene that will be described in this study from the text we will cover.

Here is God’s holy, infallible and inerrant Word. Revelation 5:1–14 says *[1] 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.

Prayer:

Almighty God, heavenly Father, Creator, Redeemer and Lord, You are an awesome, loving, all powerful, full of mercy and might and so it is that we come before You to worship Your holy Name. Lord, overcome all of my weaknesses, failings and imperfections and proclaim Your Word boldly and that we would see Your Son Jesus Christ because only He has the words of

eternal life. I pray You would give us eyes to see and ears to hear that we may behold You in all of Your glory. I pray Your Holy Spirit would work in our hearts to move us to worship You in spirit and truth that Your Name would be high and lifted up above every name and that You would be glorified. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

In Revelation 5 we see the heavens and the earth responding to the life and work of Christ in worship that is both universal and cosmic in nature. It is a scene that depicts in living images what Paul describes in Philippians 2:9–11 which says [9] *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

To be fair to Briarwood's nativity, this scene should be left out because this scene is too glorious, wonderful and holy to depict with man-made images, but we do have the immense privilege of partaking in this universal and cosmic worship every Lord's Day. Our music pastor has the weighty responsibility of leading us in worship every Lord's Day in which we, with the help of the Holy Spirit, join our voices with all the voices of heaven and earth to praise the name of Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father. So to fully appreciate the immense privilege of our Lord's Day worship let's allow ourselves to see what the Apostle John sees, feel what he feels and hear what he hears in Revelation 5.

The first thing John sees is a problem for there is something problematic about his vision. First he sees God the Father, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, sitting on His throne in all of His power, glory, splendor and majesty, being worshipped by all the hosts of heaven. I can't image a more beautiful sight than that. So far in John's vision everything is as it should be but then he notices something strange in God's right hand. He notices a scroll in Revelation 5:1.

Now as a Jew and a student of the Old Testament John would have recognized the scroll because it is mentioned in the Old Testament. The prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all write about it. This tells us that this scroll is not some futuristic weapon that will one day be used to rule the galaxy but rather it represents something ancient. It represents God's plan and destiny for the world which He decreed even before time began. Here is why I encourage people to read the book of Revelation more often. It is because now more than ever that we need to be reminded that God does indeed have a plan and a purpose for our world.

We live in an age that is increasingly devoid of meaning. Our society and culture refuses to believe in truth which hinders it from discerning right from wrong. As a result justice is often perverted, evil flourishes, and the wicked thrive. In the face of such dark times our only hope is the scroll that John now sees in God's right hand, because it alone contains God's good and perfect plan to set all things right – to establish justice, peace and love once and for all. According to the prophets contained in this scroll are all the judgments of God upon the nations of the world and these judgments will bring about eternal condemnation for the wicked and everlasting salvation for the righteous.

I want to bring out two very important things about this scroll. First, John tells us this scroll is full of writing both within and on the back. In other words, it is completely covered which means there is no room for anything else to be added to it. One writer says about this scroll; in the prearranged providences of God there are no empty spaces to be filled up by chance. Secondly, John says this scroll is sealed shut, not with just one or two but with seven seals which symbolizes that its content is complete and perfect. As a result, God's predetermined plan for the course of history is absolutely fixed. It can't be added to because it is

full and it can't be altered because it is sealed shut, but therein lies the problem with John's vision.

God's plan for the world remains unfulfilled because it is sealed shut. For this good and perfect plan to be realized it will require someone who has the authority, power and wisdom of God to open it and carry out its judgments which is why the next thing John sees in Revelation 5:2 is a mighty angel proclaiming a question with a loud voice that can be heard all throughout creation. Sadly, in response to this great question there is nothing but deafening silence. Revelation 5:2–3 says [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.*

The fact that John mentions twice that no one could look into it and that means he wants us to notice this. I think it tells us that no created being can comprehend God's plans for the world. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah God tells us in Isaiah 55:9, [9] *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* I Corinthians 2:11 says [11] *For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

This means that God's plan for creation needs a mediator who himself has the mind and spirit of God in order to carry it out. Sadly, such a being is no where to be found in all of creation and so John does what we all do whenever we are feeling helpless and afraid. John weeps bitterly because he senses the importance of this scroll. He knows if it is left unfulfilled, unopened that God's benevolence purposes for him as an individual, for His people, the church and the universe, will not be achieved. I also think that John momentarily fears here that even His Lord Jesus was found to be unworthy which according to Paul would mean that our faith is in vain. It would mean that we are still dead in our sins and that those who have died already have perished without any hope.

Paul says in I Corinthians 15:16–19, [16] *For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.* [17] *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.* [18] *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* [19] *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.* If Christ can't open the scroll what a horrific thing to imagine.

With that being said, in the face of this overwhelming silence John's weeping is an appropriate response. We should allow ourselves to feel the full weight of his grief whenever we read this part of Revelation 5. Thankfully that is not where John's vision ends. Revelation 5:5 introduces us to the solution to this problem of silence. When one of the elders in the circle of God redirects John's attention away from this grief by reminding him of his Lord Jesus's unique status when he says *"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."*

Both titles – the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David – are from two different Old Testament prophecies, about a Messiah, a Savior, who will one day come, conquer His enemies and judge them with perfect justice. These titles are of the utmost significance because they are communicating to John that Christ has indeed overcome His enemies and because He has overcome His enemies He now stands in the unique position of authority to open the scroll. At this point in the vision one might expect to see a theorist and mighty warrior, resembling something of a lion but to our surprise that is not what John sees.

As John wipes his tears, according to Revelation 5:6 John sees a lamb as though it had been slain, standing next to the right hand of the throne of God. This Lamb is none other than Christ Jesus who gave Himself up to be crucified for us all. We see the prophecy of this in Isaiah 53:5–7 which says [5] *But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. [6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. [7] He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*

Furthermore, John the Baptist, in his ministry identifies Jesus as the Lamb who has come to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29) and like the lamb of the Passover in the book of Exodus, it is the blood of Jesus who seals the servants of God and ensures that they are protected from the plagues that will be used to judge the world which we see in the following chapters of Revelation.

According to one commentator on this passage in Revelation 5 this vision of the Lamb sets forth in dramatic form the central paradox and mystery of the Christian faith. That is, that God secures victory for His people, not through fiery works of military might but through weakness of the crucifixion. Unfortunately for many people this will be impossible to understand because it is an offense to their worldly way of thinking. This is why Paul says in I Corinthians 1:18 and 25, [18] *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

At this point in the vision we need to pay close attention to how John describes the lamb in Revelation 5:6. First he describes this lamb as standing next to the throne of God. This means that God the Son is next to God the Father, standing in the very center of God's throne room surrounded by all the angelic hosts of heaven. This tells us that Jesus the Son of God rules alongside His Father with sovereign authority over the universe.

Next, John tells us that this lamb has seven horns and seven eyes. You may be thinking that this is one weird looking lamb. Let me reassure you that John is actually pointing out something very significant about our Lord and Savior. In the Old Testament horns are symbolic of power and this lamb has seven of them. The number seven in the Old Testament is symbolic for completeness and perfection. This means that Christ has full and complete power. In other words, Christ is the omnipotent One. He is all powerful. The seven eyes are the seven spirits of God. This means that Christ has the fullness of the Spirit of God upon Him. We see this when Christ was baptized and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove (Matthew 3:16, Luke 3:22). Because Christ possesses the Holy Spirit He sees and knows everything, even the mind of God, because He is God.

Now we are in a better position to see that this Lamb alone has the authority, power and wisdom to come forward and take the scroll. He is the only answer to the terrifying silence that John has previously experienced. Now I want to see how the angelic hosts respond to the sight of the lamb taking the scroll. What do they do? They fall down before Him and worship because they know that there is no one else like this Lamb in heaven or on earth or under the earth.

In Revelation 5:8 we see the prayers of the saints going up to the throne of God, because they now have an Advocate with the Father in the Lamb, who intercedes for them as their great High Priest and thereby makes their prayers acceptable in God's sight. In other words, Christ is

essential for you and me because without Him our prayers would never be heard. They would vanish without a sound and without trace with no answer at all, because it is the Lamb who is the sacrifice that makes your prayers possible. It's only through Him that our prayers have any power at all. He has ushered in a new age in which all things are now working together to accomplish God's good and redeeming purposes.

In Revelation 5:9 we see that the creatures and the elders affirm that Christ is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals in this song that they sing. According to the lyrics of the song He is worthy for three reasons. The first reason is because He was slain, He was crucified. The second reason He is worthy is because by His crucifixion He purchased a people for God through His blood. The third reason He is worthy is because He made that people to be a Kingdom and priests who shall reign on the earth. In other words, Christ's sacrificial death was the means whereby He secured for God what the first Adam lost by sinning.

In the beginning, Adam and Eve were supposed to establish a Kingdom for God by multiplying and filling the earth but they failed because of their sinful disobedience. In contrast, Christ who is the second Adam, established a Kingdom for God by offering His perfect obedience until the point of death on a cross and from that death He bought a people to be His treasured possession to do what humanity was always intended to do which was to rule and subdue the earth for God's glory. If you claim to be in Christ it is grossly inappropriate to allow sin to reign in and over you. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 6:19–20, *[19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

Furthermore, we see that it is in Christ God's promises to Abraham have been fulfilled. God promised Abraham that through his offspring the nations of the world would be blessed and in Revelation 5:9 we see that through Christ people from all nations are being adopted into God's heavenly family and being made a Kingdom of priests. In other words, Christ not only did what the first Adam couldn't do, but as a true offspring of Abraham He did what the nation of Israel couldn't do either which was to be a blessing to the world and a witness for God to the Gentiles. Up to this point in our text only the creatures and 24 elders have been worshipping the Lamb.

After they have sung their song and Christ's full significance and worth has been revealed in all of its glory, then the entire host of heaven immediately chime in. Revelation 5:11–12 says *[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!"*

Then we see the most glorious and wonderful part of John's vision. When the worship of Christ could no longer be contained as it overflows out of heaven throughout all of creation, John hears every voice of every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth giving glory, honor and praise to God and the Lamb. Where there was once terrifying silence, there is now deafening and awe inspiring praise in which the one God who exists in three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is being glorified forever and ever in universal and cosmic worship. Do you see it? Can you hear it? Do you feel it? I hope and pray that you do.

In closing, I want to remind you what our Lord Jesus tells us in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 7:21–23 says *[21] "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your*

name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ [23] And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Therefore we know when that great Day of universal and cosmic worship comes that not every knee that bows to Christ and not every tongue that confesses Him as Lord, will do it out of love and admiration, but instead will only do it out of compulsion. So today I would like to challenge you to examine your own heart. Do you come to worship every Lord’s Day out of love and admiration for the Lamb or do you come out of compulsion? Do you truly love Jesus? Do you worship and adore Him? Do you come to worship on the Lord’s Day because you are eager to sing Christ’s praises for all that He has done for you, after a long week or do you come merely because it is expected of you?

I think many times we are more like the Apostle John than we realize. We let the tears in our eyes prevent us from seeing Christ in all of His glory and fullness. By that I mean we often fail to worship Christ adequately. We fail to see Him for who He is in His Word. We fail to go to Him in prayer as we should and we fail because we are too hindered by our present circumstances – the pressures, the anxieties, the sadness, the temptations or just the overall busyness of everyday life prevent us from truly appreciating Christ for who He is. These things distract us from what life is really all about which is worshipping the Triune God and they prevent us from realizing that our life is just one very small part of a much bigger and more significant story which is all about Christ – who He is, what He has done and what He is doing.

I want to redirect your attention away from whatever is distracting you now and help you to fix your eyes on Christ. In the words of the mighty angel “Weep no more and *“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”*” Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Almighty God and heavenly Father, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Three in One and One in Three, we praise Your great and glorious Name! Father, we thank You for sending Your One and only Son that we may be adopted into Your family. Lord Jesus, we thank You for dying on the cross for our sins and paying the price that we deserve. Holy Spirit we thank You for sealing us with the blood of the Lamb and securing our souls until the Day that He comes again in the fullness of His power and glory. Lord, we pray that You would forgive us for not loving You as we ought to. Forgive us for not loving You with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Lord, I pray that You would work in our hearts today and as we go out that You would move us to worship You in spirit and in truth and that the meditations of our hearts and the words of our mouths would be pleasing and acceptable in Your sight. We pray that You would enlarge our hearts for You and that we would grow in love for Jesus Christ the Lamb more and more with each passing day. Lord, fix our eyes on Him our Savior that we may never forget whose story we are a part of and that we may never forget where our hope lies no matter what life throws at us. Lord, we pray that You would be glorified in our hearts and lives today for I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.