

The Worthiness of the Lamb

by John Nelson Darby

The book of Revelation presents the Lamb as the mediator of redemption, who is worthy to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and blessing, and will ultimately vindicate His claims in heaven.

Scripture: John 1:29, Philippians 2:9-11, Revelation 5:11-12, Revelation 6:15-17, Revelation 7:9-10, Revelation 12:10-11, Revelation 14:1-4, Revelation 19:7-9, Revelation 21:9-10, Revelation 22:1-5

Topics: "The Worthiness of Christ", "Redemption and Authority"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the worthiness of the Lamb as depicted in Revelation 5, highlighting the profound significance of Christ's title as 'the Lamb' in both His sacrificial role and His exalted position in heaven. He explains that while the Lamb was initially presented as God's provision for sin, in Revelation, He is recognized for His universal power and authority, deserving of all praise and honor. The sermon underscores the contrast between the Lamb's suffering on earth and His rightful claim to glory in heaven, where all creation acknowledges His worthiness to open the book and execute God's divine plan. Darby calls believers to recognize the Lamb's ultimate authority and the implications of His worthiness for both the church and the world. He concludes with a reminder of the joy and hope that comes from understanding the Lamb's role in redemption and His future reign.

Transcript

Revelation 5.

"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living-ones and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 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." - Rev. 5:11, 12.

Rich and blessed as are the associations in the mind of every saint of God connected with Christ's title of "the Lamb" it may be questioned whether that which stamps it, in the mind of Heaven, with its peculiar significance, has, so fully as it ought, its place and bearing in the soul. The emphatic exclamation of the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God!" indicates the grace and beauty and lowly virtues of Him who bears this name, and marks His title to the adoring worship of our hearts. But this title, as borne by the same blessed One, on high, unfolded in the book of Revelation, brings us associated with other glories and other scenes than those that, it is likely, met the holy musings of John, when he gazed on the blessed Jesus walking by the banks of Jordan, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God"

This title, familiar as it is to our hearts, is almost exclusively connected with the book of Revelation; and is unquestionably designed to indicate the special character in which the bearer of it is there presented. The observance of this may present no unuseful key to the understanding of that wondrous book, which may be "called the book of the rights of the Lamb." for, certainly, it may be affirmed, that the whole of the details and principles of the prophetic part of it are knit up with this title; while, on its first occurrence in the book, we see heaven, earth, and all redeemed creation, roused by it in joy to accord to Him who bears it, this seven-fold ascription of praise: "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." He alone is declared worthy to receive the whole tribute of the universe and to become the centre of its universal praise.

There is, doubtless, a marked difference in the presentation of "the Lamb slain" in this book, and in his presentation by the same title in John 1:29, 36, the only other place in scripture in which as a title it occurs.*

*Nowhere else, indeed, is the exact expression; for in John 1:29, 36, it is "ho amnos" but in the Revelation throughout, it is "to arnion" Acts 8:32, and 1 Peter 1:19, are comparisons, expressive of a blessed moral truth, but not applied by way of title.{Original remark}

In the expressions of John, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!" we see the person of the Lord Jesus, as God's Lamb, presented to the eye of faith, as the substantiation of all that had been prefigured in the way of atonement. He is here pointed out as the full and perfect provision of God for man's need as a sinner, and the only basis on which the mercy of a holy God can restore the guilt-stricken and polluted to his presence. This, there can be no doubt, was the immediate bearing of John's pointing to Jesus, as "the Lamb of God." But in the breadth of the terms, "that taketh away the sin of the world" it seems as if the Spirit would lead us on beyond the speciality of individual redemption, to the ultimate purpose of the manifestation of the Son of God - in the destruction of the works of the devil - to that point in the counsels of God, in which the blessed stream of redemption reaches its limit; and creation, brought back from subjection "to vanity," is again made capable of receiving and reflecting back the rays of its Creator's goodness and glory, rejoicing in "the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

The Lamb slain in sacrifice, from Abel downward, had declared on the part of the righteous holiness of God, that "Without shedding of blood is no remission;" and on the part of the love of God, the spotlessness of the victim and its being as a burnt offering "A sweet savour unto the Lord," declared as fully His delight in the perfectness of Jesus - that "Lamb without blemish and without spot" - and of His satisfaction in His wondrous, perfected, atoning work. "Christ hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savour."

"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." But in the Revelation, the "Lamb slain" is not presented so much as God's provision of love to meet a sinner's need, or as the perfect Doer of His Father's will, as He is shown, by His rejection and suffering on earth, to have gained a title in heaven to universal homage, and to be the holder of universal power. In the revelations of God to His church, things in reference to Jesus have passed beyond the limit of grace and atonement now; and we are called to contemplate what are the righteous claims of this suffering and rejected victim, as recognised on high.

It is true that the heart of a saint knows Him still as "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The cross abides still in all its wondrous mystery of love, as the attractive point of mercy to meet a sinner's heart. "Pentecost," as the pledge and seal of the resurrection and ascension-glory of the church's Head,

tells, by the presence of the abiding "Comforter," of present union, and of coming glory as the portion of the church. But beyond what the gospels reveal of incarnation and suffering; and the epistles unfold of grace untold, flowing down as the church's present portion, from her head in glory, and presenting the brightness of her hope in being "for ever with the Lord," - we have, in this book, the lifting up of a curtain, and showing things beyond the Spirit's direct testimony in the church.

First, Jesus is shown in the position of rebuke and chastening, through the hour of the church's decadence, as His witness in the world, until rejection comes of that which was wholly unworthy of His care. And then, in the prophetic part, it is not so much the Spirit down here testifying of Christ, as seen on high, in close connection with "the Lamb," who is in the midst of the throne; and as the spirit of prophecy telling indeed of the progress of things here on earth; but that not so much in regard to the events themselves, as in connection with heavenly counsels, which result in the vindication of the claims of "the Lamb."

The progress of evil is noticed; but it is noticed only as giving occasion to the introduction of the hand of power by which "the mystery of God" is finished. The opening of the seals, and the sounding of the trumpets, and the pouring out of the vials - whatever may be their effects on earth - have for their one central object, either the declaration or the enforcing by the hand of Divine Power, of the claims of the Lamb. It is, in a word, the blessed accomplishment, in power, of that word in Philipians, "He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is lord, to the glory of God the Father." Though there is this difference in the aspect in which this result of the Lord's humiliation and death are presented - here it is the reward of Christ's perfect obedience to the Father's will.

In the revelation it is the vindication, on the part of God, of the claims of Him, who, as to man, had been but a suffering victim - "led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so He opened not His mouth." Therefore, necessarily, judgment, in this vindication, falls on the world that had inflicted His injuries, and still resists His claims. The most cursory study of the book of Revelation must teach us that its object is not so much to unfold the character and fruits of redemption in relation to those who are its happy subjects, as to present the rights and claims of Him by whom redemption was, in "the travail of His soul," accomplished - His right, through redemption, to "inherit all things."

And therefore it is, throughout, that Christ, as "the Lamb," in the midst of the throne, and the actings of the throne itself, are in connection with the earth and creation, rather than directly with the church.

The fifth chapter, in which this worthiness of the Lamb is proclaimed, appears to give the entire outline of the prophetic part of the book. Nothing, as it seems, in accomplishment, can go beyond this. Heaven, earth, and all redeemed creation, in this anticipative song, recognise the full claims of Christ's mediatorial glory, as the "Lamb that was slain;" and, in accomplishment, we are brought by it down to the point, "When He shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power;" and when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father. "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

In the challenge which brings the Lamb upon the scene, however symbolic the action, there seems to be but little difficulty in ascertaining the simple truth conveyed. The question - "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" is designed to present, in strong relief, and in contrast with the hopelessness that springs from all besides, the worthiness and the power of Christ to enter into, and declare the whole mystery of God concerning the course of evil in this world, and its final redemption from its power. And more than this, to show, on whose behalf it is, and on account of whose worthiness it is, that Creation shall be delivered from the thrall of Satan, and the tribute of its praise be restored to Him whose right it is.

"No man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon." The redemption of God's inheritance from the power of Satan, is no work for man. Neither is it in the creature's power to declare through what appliances of power and wisdom the whole craft and power of Satan should be set aside. But there is one and one only found, to accept this challenge; and thus is relieved the oppressive sorrow that hung upon the prophet's heart. "I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon; 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 living ones, 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." Here the mystery is solved. In redemption Christ has obtained a title to be the whole creation's lord, as well as the church's blessed Head. As the suffering, meek, and unresisting Victim, Heaven accords to Him the title to universal power and praise. Already - though hidden in the throne - He is manifested to the eye of faith, as being possessed of the perfection of power - "having seven horns" - and also of the controlling, all-pervading energy of God's universal Spirit - "having seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth." Here, therefore, there is One equal to solve this problem; unsolvable by all besides; and to accept a challenge that must be declined by all besides. For who can undertake to save the rights of the eternal God, and to bring back a sin-stained universe to His favour? And who can expel the power of evil by which the scattering and dissevering from God of His creation had been achieved? Before this can be, sin must be atoned, and death undone, and Satan bound. But all this power and worthiness is found in Him who was David's Son and David's Lord. "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." In death, this title of Redeemer has been sealed as the Lamb's; and in redemption-power will all God's glory, in connection with the creature, eventually stand. The tribute of the universe must be paid alone to Him, who to the death asserted the glory of God in a world of evil; and who, in the administration of the affluence of His power and glory, will turn every stream of creature-good back to the Creator's praise.

Happy is it for the saint, thus instructed in the mind of heaven, to rest in the love and grace of Him who is in the midst of the throne; and happier still, in seeking now to uphold the honour of His name, to count on His power alone, who has the "seven horns and the seven eyes." For how surely is His power and grace directed to sustain the heart that counts on His goodness in seeking in a world of evil to do His will. Soon that power, which now secretly sustains, controls, and overrules, amidst the confusion of Satan's power, will be openly displayed. And how is the heart's joy augmented by the thought, that then the worthiness of the Lamb will not be a secret carried feebly in the bosom of the saint, and contradicted and gainsaid on every hand besides; but evil being removed by the hand of Power, every eye shall gaze upon His beauty,

and every heart shall own His claims, and every voice re-echo His worthy praise! And Oh how soon will this bright scene of glory burst upon our dim anticipations! "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." "And He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly." But there is another side of the picture. Heaven's counsels about the Lamb, alas! are fraught alone with sorrow for great Babylon in her luxurious glory, and for the thoughtless dwellers on the earth! When power Divine shall be put forth to vindicate the claims of earth's rejected Victim, what but dismay and displacement can be the result to those who despise His name, and will at last be found in martial array to resist His claims. "These shall make war with the lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them; for He is King of kings, and Lord of lords!" But before this hour arrives what a picture of the world's dismay does the Lamb's opening of the sixth seal present! "And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb; for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

It would be too wide a field, to comment in succession on each instance in this book in which, in different aspects and varied connections, we are brought into contact with the Lamb. In tracing through, from the fifth chapter to the end, "the Lamb" is ever in the ascendancy.

The song of Heaven is, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain" (Rev. 5:6-13.) It is from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, that the men of this world seek to hide themselves in fear (Rev. 6:15, 16). The palm-bearing multitude, before the throne, have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9-14). It is the Lamb that feeds them and leads them (as a shepherd) "to living fountains of waters" (Rev. 7:17). It is the blood of the Lamb that answers all the accusations of Satan, as the accuser of the brethren day and night, on high (Rev. 12:10, 11). It is in the book of life of the Lamb slain, that the names of the faithful are found written amidst the corruptions of the beast (Rev. 13:8). It is the Lamb, also, on Mount Zion with the sealed-ones, whose honour and privilege it is, to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Rev. 14:1-4). Again, whoever worships the beast or his image, and receives his mark in his forehead or in his hand, will be tormented in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (Rev. 14:9, 10). It is the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, that is sung with the "harps of God," by those who, in victory over the beast, stand on "the sea of glass" (Rev. 15:2-4). It is against the Lamb, that the beast and the ten kings make war; and the Lamb shall overcome them; for he is "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rev. 17:12-14). It is the marriage of the Lamb, that strikes the note of joy in heaven; and to be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb, is the mark of honour and blessing then (Rev. 19:7-9). And, after the seals are loosed, and the trumpets are blown, and the vials poured out, when Satan is bound and the clangour of earth's judgment is hushed, it is "the bride the Lamb's wife," that is the wondrously glorious spectacle on which the Apostle is called to gaze (Rev. 21:9). They are the twelve apostles of the Lamb, whose names are in the twelve foundations of the "holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:14). Of this city the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple, and "the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:22, 23). There is to be no inhabitant in this glorious city "whose name is not written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). And, onwards, "the river of the water of life" flows out of "the throne of God and the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1). And finally, there is to

be no more curse, because the throne of God and of the Lamb are to be there (Rev. 22:3, 4, 5).

These are but brief and desultory notices of the wondrous character and claims of Him who in heaven is seen as "the Lamb." A suffering victim here on earth, now hid for a season in heaven, but about to be brought forth in full investiture of heaven's glory; and in vindication of His claims, no place to be allowed for any that refuse to bow in homage to His name, "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living-ones, and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; 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. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." The scattering and confusion, and sorrow, and death, that sin has brought into the universe of God, admit of no remedy but in redemption. And accordingly the Lamb's title to the glory and praise of restored creation is founded in this. "They sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood." This estimate of Heaven of the Lamb's worthiness and the preparations on high to enforce His claims, cast a dreadful shadow over the ease, and glory, and power, and security of the world! "Redemption" - alas! the world knows not the meaning of the word! And as to "the Lamb" its whole peace hangs only on the abeyance of His claims!

While the main subject of this book is the presentation and enforcement of the claims of Christ to universal homage, and to universal power, as the suffering Lamb, there is that which gleams forth, as it were incidentally in the vindication of His glory. Far away from the scene of conflict, and before the Lamb comes forth sitting on "the white horse," as "King of kings, and Lord of lords, in righteousness to judge and to make war," there is seen in the peaceful courts of heaven, "the marriage of the Lamb" and, it is added "his wife hath made herself ready!" For his glory cannot be asserted, and another not be with him in the scene. That "we may be glorified together" is the strange word of scripture! The joy must begin on high, before the glory is displayed below. From heaven the Lamb comes forth to redeem the inheritance, and to take possession of His glory; and "when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory."

And how does this teach the heart of one who knows the espousal of the church to Christ, how little it has to do with all the busy aims of men; and how little reason it has to covet the world's wisdom, power, or glory, which are but the usurped rights of Christ; while another Lord and Prince is owned. It is not the earth in the power of redemption yet, and yielding its willing homage to the Lamb; but it is the world which made the Lamb a suffering Victim, and still retains its opposition to His claims.

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