Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Vision of the Lamb, Part 1
Scripture: Revelation 5:1-4
Code: 66-20

We are in for a great thrill as we come into the fifth chapter of the book of Revelation. And I want you to turn to it. This is a tremendous chapter. We could call it, "A Vision of the Lamb...A Vision of the Lamb."

By way of introduction, let me just say that many have desired to rule the world. Many have desired to be the ultimate monarch. Certainly there was Lucifer, son of the morning, the anointed cherub who is now known as Satan, the adversary, diabolos, the devil. He desired to rule the world and the universe.

From a human viewpoint there was Nebuchadnezzar. There was Darius. There was Alexander the Great. There was Genghis Khan. There was Napoleon. There was Hitler. There was Lenin. There were Stalin and the rest of the lesser lights of human history who have sought to conquer the world. And some day there will be Antichrist, as he is known, the most powerful human who will ever represent Satan in the world, who will subdue all of the aspiring rulers of the west and the east and the north and the south and set out to conquer the world and rest it, as it were, the hands of God.

All of these men, and many, many others, have desired to rule the world, to conquer in some way the universe, to control the earth. And all of them have and will fail. Only one individual has the right and only one individual has the power to take back the universe from sin and the curse and Satan's usurping attempt at rebellion. That one who has the right and the power is described here in chapter 5. He is the central person in this incredible vision. No one else is worthy. Turning the table a bit, even to talk about the righteous men that we might assume would be capable of ruling the world, none of them is in fact qualified, not Adam, not Abraham, not Isaac, not Jacob, not Joseph, not Enoch, not Elijah, not Moses, not David, not Solomon, not Peter, not James, not John, not Paul, not anyone who has lived since. No evil man and no good man, no evil committee, no good committee, no human and no demon, no angel is capable of ruling the world. None of them have either the authority, that is the power, or the right.

There is only one. There is only one who is rightly and capably the conqueror of the world and we meet Him in this chapter. Only one who will take the universe back from the curse, redeeming it from sin and Satan and death. This chapter introduces us to that one. And, in fact, the chapter really begins where chapter 4 ended. The scene is still the sky.

Back in chapter 4 verse 1 there was a door standing open in heaven. And John was taken up there in a vision and he's still there as he writes in chapter 5. The scene then is the throne of God, the cherubim, the twenty-four elders on their twenty-four thrones are there. The crystal platform is there. The diamond and ruby glory of God still shines through an emerald rainbow. Lightning and thunder are still there. The Holy Spirit in His seven-fold shining glory is there. And all of the hosts of heaven are worshiping. It is the same scene exactly. All the glorious action and all the glorious praise as Almighty God stirs from the posture of patience to ready Himself to end man's day and Satan's day in an ultimate holocaust of ignited judgment, really set by the Tribulation is about to break loose. We're in that same scene...the scene of initial and unfolding action in chapter 4 that will yield the judgment that starts in chapter 6 is still going on in chapter 5. God begins to move. He is about to unleash His wrath, about to ignite the Tribulation which sets as sort of like the pilot light to set on fire the conflagration of the end, the time when the Lord takes back the universe and paradise is regained.

And the center of this aspect of the scene in heaven in chapter 5 is the one who leads the redemption. This is the moment that we've been waiting for. This is the moment that I believe every Christian anticipates. This is the moment when the redemption, as Paul calls it in Ephesians 1:14, of God's own possession takes place. This is the moment that all creation, according to Romans 8, has been groaning for. This is the moment of the glorious manifestation of the children of God.

And so, as we come back to the throne in verse 1, we pick it up right where we left off, we see John in his vision and God who has been seated up to this point tells us back in chapter 4, "He was sitting on the throne," and that's really all it says about Him in terms of His person. Now He begins to move. And in chapter 5 we read this, "And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book, or a scroll, literally, written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals."

God who up to this point is just sitting, sitting in the midst of all of the light and the glory and the flashing and the thunder and the praise and adoration, sitting, begins to stir. And the first thing God does is reach out His hand, an anthropomorphic description, obviously God is visibly seen in some kind of human form by John in this vision, and on His up-turned palm sits a scroll. And John says, "I saw it." That little phrase "and I saw" is repeated a number of times. Verse 2 begins "and I saw." Verse 6 begins "and I saw." And verse 11 begins "and I saw." John is still in this amazing vision and he's reporting exactly what he sees. He is an eyewitness to the future unfolding of God's judgment as He sets out to take back His universe. He says, "I saw," epee, in the Greek, "upon the right hand of Him who sat on the throne, Almighty God with the outstretched hand. And what did he see? A scroll, biblion, a scroll...in ancient times they didn't have books or codex, as they became known, when the pages were cut, as it were, and bound together in what we know as a book. Prior to the invention of the codex, or the book, they had a scroll and it was usually rolled up from both ends into the middle. And it was written on the scroll, that was the document. In fact, it tells us that something was written on the inside and on the back. The scroll would have been made possibly out of papyrus in ancient

times which was a reed, possibly out of parchment, some form of paper product, possibly out of animal skin, some kind of animal skin.

This scroll had some very curious characteristics. Look at them. "It was written inside and on the back and it was sealed up with seven seals." The only thing initially that culturally looks familiar to us there at first might be that the Romans sealed a will seven times. When somebody wrote their will they sealed it seven times. What that meant was as the scroll was rolled up, they would seal the edge of it so that it would be sealed repeatedly until it was finally closed. You couldn't open it unless you periodically broke a seal and a little further broke a seal and a little further broke a seal, the seal would be on the edge. That prevented people from looking at it without the authorization.

But this is really not simply a will and testament. There's something more here than just that. These two features give us some clues as to the nature of the scroll and its contents. The fact is, this was typical of a contract in the ancient world, very typical. Our own Dr. Robert Thomas writing in his commentary on Revelation has written this, "This kind of contract was known all over the Middle East in ancient times and was used by the Romans from the time of Nero on. The full contract would be written on the inner pages and then sealed with seven seals." Not just a will but various kinds of contracts. "Then the content of the contract would be described briefly on the outside."

In other words, it was very important once it was sealed multiple times and couldn't be opened by any unauthorized person to write on the outside of the scroll something that would describe what was in it. And so there would be the inside with all of the fullness of what needed to be in the contract and the outside would be a summary of what was on the inside without the details.

Dr. Thomas goes on to say, "All kinds of transactions were consummated this way including marriage contracts, rental and lease agreements, release of slaves, contract, bills and even bonds. Support comes also from Hebrew practices. The Hebrew document most closely resembling this scroll was a title deed which was folded and signed, requiring at least three witnesses. A portion of text would be written and then sealed with a different witness signing at each sealing and a larger number of witnesses meant that more importance was assigned to the document."

All of that just to say it was a common way to deal with contracts. So we can safely say that this scroll is some kind of a contract or a deed. It is some kind of a statement about ownership in this case. The details are on the inside, unknown to us. And the summary of what is on the inside is on the outside. It would then be sealed to make it authentic with wax or clay or some other soft material.

A good illustration of this is back in Jeremiah 32. Let me take you back there because you need to understand this in order to really grasp the import of the imagery of Revelation 5. Back in Jeremiah 32, I'll show you how this worked by taking you to a biblical illustration. Jeremiah 32...Jeremiah now lived, keep in mind a little bit of your history, Old Testament history, Jeremiah lived in the day just

prior to the fall of Jerusalem, just prior to the fall of Jerusalem which resulted in the Babylonian captivity when they were taken away. The main date being 586 B.C., Jeremiah lived just prior to that, just prior to when Nebuchadnezzar began to conquer and destroy and take captive the people of Judah.

Jeremiah the prophet had been telling his people that they would be judged by God. He told them that because of their continuing sin, what the prior prophets had said like Isaiah, was in fact going to come to pass and it was going to come to pass rapidly. And God was actually going to send a conqueror and they were going to be destroyed and devastated, dispossessed of their land and hauled off into captivity which would last for seventy years.

Now Jeremiah had preached this and everybody knew he preached it. Jeremiah had a cousin, a man named there in verse 7 of the chapter, by the name of Hanamel. Now Hanamel, his cousin, had a piece of ground and he was a pretty shrewd business man and he knew that once the conquering army came and took them out of the land, his land would be worthless. So being a shrewd guy he wanted to sell it and get all the money while the land still had value. He had to make his transaction rapidly because of the impending disaster. It would then be under the control of enemies and it wouldn't do him any good at all. Actually, the truth is in Jeremiah 32 the siege is already in the land. Already by this time a field in Jeremiah's home town of Anathoth was occupied by the Babylonian army. They were already moving toward Jerusalem.

And Hanamel was desperate. Strangely he went to Jeremiah to try to find a buyer. Verse 8, "Then Hanamel, my uncle's son, came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of the Lord and said to me, `Buy my field, please, that is at Anathoth which is in the land of Benjamin, for you have the right of possession and the redemption is yours, buy it for yourself.'" Now that sounds like an absolutely ridiculous thing to do, absolutely absurd. Jeremiah's going to be dead before the captivity is over, so is Hanamel. What in the world does Jeremiah care about it? After all, we're being hauled away into captivity, this is the end. Why do a foolish thing like that?

Well there's a good reason at the end of verse 8. "Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord." Just as it said in the beginning of verse 8 that Hanamel came to him according to the word of the Lord, Jeremiah said, "I knew indeed it was the word of the Lord and I bought the field which was at Anathoth from Hanamel, my uncle's son, and I weighed out the silver for him, seventeen shekels of silver and I signed and sealed the deed and called in witnesses and weighed out the silver on the scales."

Notice in verse 10 he signed and...what?...sealed the deed. The deed then would have been carrying all the data about the land, just like when you buy a piece of property today, it would mark out the boundaries of the land, talk something about the topography of the land and it would give clear title to Jeremiah and his progeny, or those who came after him.

Verse 11 says, "I took the deeds of purchase, both the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions and the open copy." What you have here is very similar to the double writing in the...in the sealed document in Revelation 5. Here there's a second document. The sealed document is kept in the file, never to be opened and it is written on the outside as to a summary of what's in it. But there's a second document, a copy document which can be looked at which is a facsimile of the real one. "And I gave the deeds of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah in the sight of Hanamel, my uncle's son, and in the sight of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase before all the Jews who were sitting in the court of the guard."

This is like having a notary. Everybody saw it. Everybody signed on to it. It was legitimate. It was legal.

"And I commanded Baruch in their presence saying, `Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, take these deeds, this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, put them in an earthenware jar that they may last a long time.'" This is going to be a long delay before somebody gets back to take possession. "For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land." The promise of God that there would be a return.

And so there would be a restoration. There would be a time coming back into the land. And, in fact, Jeremiah 29:10 says the land would be more valuable then than it was at this time. Such deeds typically were written and sealed and then put in some kind of an earthen jar and even buried in the ground. The land belonged then to Jeremiah but he wasn't going to possess it. He was to be driven out. He was to be rejected. He was to die but some day his heirs would come back in the return and they would have the authority to break the seals and take the land. So that little scroll was the title deed to the inheritance of the land.

Now go back to Revelation. Now you understand what you have here. Similarly here is a title deed. It is a title deed to the earth. The earth and the universe came under captivity in the Fall. But the document that displays who really owns it, God has had all the time in His possession, He authored it. He has rightful claim to it. And the little scroll, as it were, on the up-turned hand of Almighty God seated on the throne is the official document that grants the created universe to the Lord Himself to be reclaimed from Satan and his usurping demons and men who have occupied it during God's absence, as it were. And you remember that I told you that there is an oratorio that runs through chapters 4 and 5, it is an oratorio of redemption. And in chapter 4 it is the oratorio of redemption of creation and in chapter 5 it is the oratorio of the redemption of men through final glorious salvation. But it does involve the whole of the universe as well as the redemption of God's own purchase possession in Christ.

Now the contents of this little scroll differ from the usual details that spell out ownership. And this is a very important note to make. Usually in a contract that spelled out ownership, when you opened it up if it were the title deed to the universe, it would say, "And the universe is so long and so high and so wide and so deep and God is the rightful owner and here is the identification of who He is. He is God the Almighty One," and it might give all of His names and titles and a little of His background, history and a little bit about what He did so He would be easily identifiable and maybe His signature.

In other words, pertinent data to the description of the owner and pertinent data to the description of what it is that He owns. But since that would be an utter impossibility to write down, how can you write down an infinite possession, how can you describe the parameters of an infinite ownership and how can you describe or identify the heritage of an eternal God? And so rather than rolling it open and saying this is the nature of what He owns and this is who He is, when you open this one you don't have that kind of information, but rather you have how He will take back what is His. Not why it is His, but how He will possess it. And so the unrolling of the scroll then describes how the Lord will take back His rightful possession. The scroll then contains not descriptions of the earth and the universe, nor descriptions of God Himself, but detailed descriptions of His judgments, of His attacks, of His wrath, of His vengeance and of His repossession of what is rightfully His. The scroll contains, in fact, the full account of how the Lord Jesus Christ, the rightful heir, will take back what is His by an acting severe wrath. It is a scroll then of doom, of scroll of doom.

So, here in the hand of almighty, sovereign, holy and all-glorious God is the plan to judge the wicked universe and bring the whole thing in to the control of the One who is the rightful heir, even the Lord Jesus Christ. This little scroll will carry in it the hideous destiny of the unsaved world and the fallen angels. The purging power of God's wrath is described. The effects of sin and its disastrous impact on this universe and how they will be ended and reversed. And so we can say the consequences of this scroll's contents are immeasurable and eternal. And that is why it can't even be described in those terms but only in the terms of the actual action by which it is taken back. So what you have then is the official document that determines the climax of human history as God takes back His universe.

Two other Old Testament texts bear on this, and I just want to mention them to you and have you look briefly. Look at Ezekiel chapter 2. Remember in chapter 1 of Ezekiel there is likewise a vision of heaven. And interestingly enough in chapter 2, a very, very similar statement is made to what we read in Revelation 5. The vision of chapter 1 parallels the vision of Revelation 4, and the sealed scroll of chapter 5 parallels the sealed scroll of Ezekiel 2. Down in verse 9 of Ezekiel 2, "I looked, behold, a hand was extended to me and lo, a scroll was in it. When He spread it out before me it was written on the front and on the back and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe."

The scroll, the same scroll...when Ezekiel goes to heaven way back then in his vision he sees the hand of God with the same scroll. And it's sealed, but he can see a little of what is written on the

outside of it and it is lamentations, mourning and woe. It doesn't spell it out in detail, it's only a summary, but it is a sad and frightening summary.

Now Daniel chapter 12. In the last chapter of Daniel's prophecy and we find a very interesting statement. In Daniel 12 and verse 4, "But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the scroll until the end of time. Many will go back and forth and knowledge will increase."

What does this mean, seal up the scroll? Now listen carefully. Throughout Daniel's prophecy, as you know, he has been receiving revelations and visions about the future, particularly from chapter 10 on, he has been receiving prophecies of future judgment at the end of the age, at the end of human history. He has even gotten information about the Antichrist and how his career is going to go and what his battle plan and operation is like. And now the vision is done. The vision of the future time of Tribulation, the career of Antichrist and his operation is done and so the Lord says to Daniel, "Roll up the scroll...roll it up and seal it until the end of time, seal it up."

This really is instruction from God through a glorious angel who is telling Daniel to set that material aside until the future time when it is to be opened. And there's only one person who can open it, only one who has the right and one who has the power to enact what is written in it.

Notice also in verse 4 a very interesting statement that concludes the verse. He says, "Seal up the book, or the scroll, until the end of time, many will go back and forth and knowledge will increase." A most interesting statement.

Every Old Testament use of this verb form "going back and forth," every time it is used in the Old Testament in the form that it is in here, it refers to the movement of a person in search of something. Someone searching and searching and searching, most frequently searching for information, for understanding, for truth. You find such uses in 2 Chronicles 16:9, Jeremiah 5:1, Jeremiah 49:3, Amos 8:12, Zechariah 4:10 and elsewhere. And the picture here is this, at the time of the end people are going to be running around trying to find the answers to what is happening...the career of Antichrist, all of the beginnings and unfoldings of divine judgment, they're going to be desiring to know and to understand and comprehend and grasp all of this and so they'll be moving around trying to get some answers. And wonderfully it says at the end of verse 4, "And knowledge will increase." And I believe what the Spirit of God is saying through the glorious angel to Daniel is, they're going to find some answers.

Some people are going to find the answers. I believe there are going to be people in the end times when the judgments begin and the scroll begins to be unrolled at the end of the age that are going to panic and they're going to want to know the truth and they're going to run to find it and some of them are going to end up in Daniel and some are going to end up in Revelation and ultimately they're going to end up with the knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that is why in Revelation chapter 7

verses 1 to 9 it says there will be an innumerable number of Gentiles converted from every tongue and tribe and people and nation along with the 144 thousand Jews who are God's evangelists. There will be in that time a great, great salvation movement of God worldwide as people run to and fro in the midst of the unfolding judgment to find the answers. And I believe that there will be the greatest harvest of souls for the Kingdom of any period of time in history. Millions may turn to the Scripture for answers to what is happening in the world and the knowledge will increase. They will find the answers.

When will this book be unsealed? When will it be opened? When will the knowledge come? Look at verse 5, Daniel 12, "Then I Daniel looked and behold, two others were standing, one on this bank of the river and the other on that bank of the river and one said to the man dressed in linen who was above the waters of the river, `How long will it be until the end of these wonders?'"

Now Daniel sees one angel on one side of the river, another angel on the other side of the river and over the top of the river is this man dressed in linen. Two angels ask the question, the question Daniel wanted to ask...how long will it be until the end of these wonders? When does this happen? When is the scroll opened up and completed?

"And the man dressed in linen appears." Who is this man dressed in linen? Go back to chapter 10 of Daniel and verse 5. "I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen." Good, now we're going to get an answer. "Whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. His body also was like beryl," a kind of a yellow stone. "His face has the appearance of lightning, His eyes were like flaming torches, His arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze and the sound of His words like the sound of a tumult."

Does that sound familiar to you? Does that sound like Revelation chapter 1? Indeed it does. I think there's little question but that this One in fine linen is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ in a preincarnate appearance. In fact, Daniel had the same reaction that John had in chapter 1 of Revelation. It says in verse 7, "Now I Daniel alone saw the vision while the men who were with me didn't see the vision. Nevertheless a great dread fell on them and they ran away to hide themselves." They didn't see the vision but the whole thing scarred them even though they couldn't see it. Now we don't know what they were reacting to but there was some phenomena. They couldn't...probably means they couldn't clearly discern what was gong on. "So I was left alone and saw this great vision, yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor and I retained no strength. But I heard the sound of His words and as soon as I heard the sound of His words I fell in to a deep sleep on my face with my face to the ground." Now frankly, you don't do that purposely. He was knocked into a coma by the frightening experience of seeing the exalted second member of the trinity.

Here is the image of One who is holy. That's what linen symbolizes. One who is sovereign, that's what the gold belt symbolizes. One who is a transparent flashing jewel, the beryl, speaks of His glory. And then He was powerful, the lightning indicates that. One who is omnipotent, His feet are burnished bronze, He is omnipotent in His judgment. Who is omniscient, His eyes are like flaming torches and who was authoritative, His voice like rushing water. It couldn't be anybody but the Lord. So you're not surprised when you go back now to chapter 12 and you see in verse 8, Daniel says, "As for me, I heard but couldn't understand so I said, `My Lord, what will the outcome of these events be?'" It could be that he knew it was the Lord.

So, the figure in linen, the man dressed in linen above the waters of the river is none other than the preincarnate Christ. And how fitting it is cause the scroll is now sealed. How long is it going to be sealed? If anybody knows, He does. Verse 7, "I heard the man dressed in linen who was above the waters of the river as He raised His right hand and His left toward heaven and swore by Him who lives forever," that is God, "that it would be for a time, times and half a time." A time is one, times are two, a half a time is a half, that's one plus two plus a half. It's going to come in a three and a half-year period. We call that period The Great Tribulation.

It's going to come after the shattering of the power of the holy people. What does that mean? The breaking of Israel. It's going to come after Israel is broken through suffering and persecution and devastation. Who is it that brings that upon them? Antichrist. You have a tribulation time of seven years. For the first half of the Tribulation, Antichrist makes a pact with Israel. In the middle of the seven years, according to Matthew 24, according to Daniel in his prophecy also, and according to the book of Revelation, there is going to be a tremendous movement against Israel, it's called the abomination of desolations by Daniel and by our Lord in Matthew 24. During the middle of that week the Antichrist has had a peace pact with Israel, he violates it, he starts to persecute them and that's what begins the three and a half years, the time, times and half a time. And that's when the full contents of that scroll are unleashed. Seven seals are broken, seven trumpets blow and seven bowls of wrath are poured out in furious judgment.

But it is after the breaking or the shattering of the power of the holy people. What does that mean? It's after Satan and Antichrist have been used to devastate Israel. What does that mean? That devastation becomes their point of salvation because they lose their self-confidence, they lose their self-sufficiency, they are persecuted, they are devastated. And I believe it is then that what Zechariah said in chapter 12 and 13 will come to pass, "They will look on Him whom they've pierced, they'll mourn for Him as an only son and a fountain for cleansing and salvation will be opened to Israel."

After Israel is devastated, after Israel is converted in their brokenness, then the full events will be completed, it says in verse 7. They start out at the beginning of the seven years, moving slowly and then they escalate in their speed until the very end is a rapid fire pouring out of bowls one after the other.

That much information only made Daniel want more. So in verse 8 he says, "As for me, I heard but couldn't understand, so I said, `What's going to be the outcome of this?'"  How does it end?  "And the man dressed in linen said, `Go your way, Daniel, I can't tell you. These words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.'" Many will be purged, purified and refined. There's going to be salvation. The wicked are going to act wickedly. And they're not going to understand anything. But those who have insight will understand. And from the time of the regular sacrifice being abolished, the abomination of desolation being set up, there will be twelve hundred and ninety days. And he adds another 45 days in the next verse, "Until the final setting up of the Kingdom." Twelve hundred and ninety days is three and a half years. He says I can't tell you anymore. I can only tell you that the fury of it is going to unfold in three and a half years. I can't tell you how it's going to end, it's sealed up.

Now let's go to Revelation. God holds in His hand now the book. And you know what? It's about to be opened. It's about to be opened. What Ezekiel couldn't know, what Daniel couldn't know, we're going to know. John's going to be the first person to see it and to hear it. This little book has to do with the redemption of God's created universe and everything that is in it. It's a scroll of doom but it is also a scroll of redemption. It is the book of the final acts of God. It is the book concerning the liberation of the universe. It is the book of the judgment of God on the alien and the usurper who have tried to destroy what belongs to God. It is the book that tells how the usurper and the co-operating men and demons will be judged and destroyed. It is the book about the casting out of Satan, about the destruction of the dragon, about the ending of death and sin. It is the book about the redemption of the whole purchased possession of God. And it's all going to unfold before us starting from here.

The rightful heir is going to come and the scroll is going to be opened. And remember, the inside of the scroll contains how it's going to become God's, not why it belongs to Him...that is obvious, because He is the Creator and the Redeemer. He created it and it belongs to Him and He redeemed it and it doubly belongs to Him. This is that moment that must have been in the mind of the writer as he wrote in Luke 21:28, "Straighten up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near." We stand then when we're in this chapter on the brink of this incredible movement of God.

To understand the chapter we have to divide it into three parts...the search for the worthy one, the selection of the worthy one, and the song of the worthy one. We'll just begin that first point...the search for the worthy one.

Verse 2, "And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, `Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?'" A strong angel with a loud voice. The word "proclaiming" has inherent in it speaking loudly, and when you add loud to loud, you get very loud. This strong angel is shouting, you know why? Because he wants his voice to penetrate every corner of the universe. And he is asking,

"Who is worthy to come? Who has the innate, inherent worthiness of character, the virtue? Who is qualified to break the seals? Who is the rightful heir? To whom belongs the inheritance?"

But there's more than that. The end of verse 3 says he not only has to be worthy, he has to be able. "Who is able? Who can throw out Satan? Who can wipe out demon power? Who can destroy sinners? Who can obliterate sin? Who can reverse the curse, the curse on animals, the curse on plants, the curse even on the human body and mind? Who can do it? Who has the power and who has the privilege?"

By the way, a strong angel...doesn't tell us who he is, but I suggest to you a little hint, the name Gabriel means "strength of God." Daniel 8:16 you might compare. Maybe it's Gabriel. And the cry echoes through the whole universe, yet no man moves, no man stirs, no angel stirs, no demon moves because none of them have the right to the throne.

Who is worthy? Who has the character? Who has the heritage? Who is the divine progeny, if you will, who has a right to possess it? And who has the ability and who has the power and who has the might to overthrow the intruders?

Michael was there. He doesn't speak. Gabriel was there. And unless he asks the question he doesn't speak either. Myriads and myriads, thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand angels are there and none of them speak. Millions of Old Testament saints are there including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Elijah, Elisha, Moses, David, Job, Ezekiel, Daniel, none of them speak. Millions of New Testament saints are there, the Apostles are there, the great missionaries of all of history of the church are there, the great saints, the godly are there and none of them speak. Nobody says anything.

And verse 3 says, "Why? And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth, no angel, no man and no demon was able to open the book or to look into it. Nobody...nobody." Everywhere in the universe, everywhere...heaven, earth, under the earth, that's simply a way of saying everywhere and every being. A search of the universe physical, a search of the universe spiritual, a search from hell to heaven and all points in between and no one is worthy. No one is able to open it and look into it. What does that mean? Examine its contents and execute them. No one has the right and no one has the power.

And John's reaction is really amazing. In verse 4 he says, "I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or look into it." There aren't supposed to be any tears in heaven. It's kind of a shame that John introduced them. But he's unrestrained in his emotions and he's really just a visitor there. When it says, "I began to weep greatly," he uses the same verb that's used in Luke 19:41 of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, unrestrained emotion. This is the only time there are tears in heaven, except for those shed by God Himself as they are described in Jeremiah 13, and

they were shed, as it were, by God through the eyes of Jeremiah. In John, a visitor in the vision seeing heaven's throng but perhaps unseen by heaven's throng, his heart is so deeply grieved that he begins to sob. And he sobs because no one was found worthy to open the book and no one was able to execute what was in it. This is sad.

Does this mean it's just going to go on the way it's always been? W.A. Criswell writes, "These represent the tears of all God's people through all the centuries. Those tears of the Apostle John are the tears of Adam and Eve driven out of the Garden of Eden as they bowed over the first grave, as they watered the dust of the ground with their tears over the silent still form of their son Abel. Those are the tears of the children of Israel in bondage as they cried unto God in their affliction and slavery. They are the tears of God's elect through the centuries as they cried unto heaven. They are the sobs and the tears that have been wrung from the heart and soul of God's people as they looked on their silent dead, as they stand beside their open graves, as the experience and the trials and sufferings of life, heartaches and disappointments indescribable. Such is the curse that sin has laid on God's beautiful creation and this is the damnation of the hand of him who holds it, that usurper, that interloper, that intruder, that alien, that stranger, that dragon, that serpent, that Satan-devil. And John wept audibly for the failure to find a redeemer because it meant that this earth and its curse is consigned forever to death. It meant that death and sin and damnation and hell should reign forever and ever and the sovereignty of God's earth should remain forever in the hands of Satan."

And he wept. But his weeping was not fitting. His weeping was not fitting. As far as he could see there wasn't anyone. But he shouldn't have wept. He shouldn't have wept because of what was about to happen. As I thought about John's tears being inappropriate, I was reminded of Luke 7, look at Luke 7. There were other people who wept because of the sorrow of the world and they wept inappropriately. Verse 11: "Now as He approached the gate of the city, behold a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother and she was a widow. And a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her He felt compassion for her and He said to her, `Do not weep, stop sobbing, it's inappropriate.'" Why was it inappropriate? It was inappropriate because of what Jesus was about to do. "And He came up and touched the coffin and the bearers came to a halt and He said, `Young man, I say to you, arise.' And the dead man sat up and began to speak." And probably said, "Thanks a lot for coming to my funeral, folks." "And Jesus gave him back to his mother."

It was inappropriate to weep. Why? Because Jesus was going to act. Look at chapter 8 of Luke and verse 52. Backing up from there, verse 49, He was speaking, someone came from the house of the synagogue official saying, "Your daughter has died...your daughter's died. Don't trouble this teacher anymore.'

"When Jesus heard this He answered him, `Do not be afraid any longer, only believe and she'll be made well.' And when He had come to the house He didn't allow anyone to enter with Him except

Peter and John and James and the girl's father and mother. They were all weeping and lamenting for her but He said, `Stop weeping, it's inappropriate.'" It's inappropriate...why? She hasn't died, she's only asleep, it isn't permanent, she was dead in the physical sense but it was not permanent so it couldn't really be called death, she's just asleep. "They began laughing at Him knowing that she had died. He, however, took her by the hand and called saying, `Child, arise.'"

In those two illustrations, beloved, you have this...Jesus saying your tears are inappropriate because of what I am about to do. And so were John's because of what Jesus Christ was about to do. And if you want to find out what it was, come back next Sunday night. Let's pray.

Father, what a thrilling adventure we've had tonight in this chapter. We're actually overwhelmed by it. All of the years of tears and death and sorrow and weeping and crying and pain and disease and all creation groaning and waiting for the moment of redemption. All the tears that have fallen into the ground, for all the millennia of human existence have bemoaned and sobbed over the curse and the curser, Satan, Your arch-enemy, and all of creation has longed for paradise to be restored and how thrilling it is to be taken to heaven with John and to see a scene where an angel cries to the ends of the universe and says...Who's worthy? And no one moves and no one speaks. And for a moment it feels like there never will be a paradise regained and a paradise restored and so we might with John weep and sob and say...Is it always going to be like this? But our tears are inappropriate because there is a worthy One, and there is an able One who will step forward, the rightful heir. It is His by creation. It is His by crucifixion. And He will take it back. It is in that hope that we live and it is for that coming that we plead and must be ready if we're to share in the inheritance and not to feel the wrath. Father, fill us with hope, hope in knowing Christ is our Redeemer who has reconciled us to God through faith in His death and resurrection. We pray in His wonderful name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2016 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).