

“Worthy Is the Lamb”

Perspective is a powerful thing. Maybe you’ve seen the pictures that fool your perspective. Someone stands near the camera with a famous landmark behind them at a distance. If they hold their hand just right and the picture-taker stands at the correct angle, the resulting picture looks like they are holding a pyramid in their palm, or have the Statue of Liberty dangling from their fingertips. Maybe it takes a little while, but then you figure out the perspective and laugh at their creativity.

Perspective makes a difference. Consider Saul’s perspective in today’s first lesson (Acts 9:1-19). From his upbringing and his life experience, he viewed Christianity as a dangerous cult that had developed out of Judaism. He thought that he was serving God best by hunting down anyone associated with it. That was all he could see. And then his perspective changed. He learned powerfully that he was not serving God, but was persecuting the risen Lord Jesus himself.

Perspective made a difference in today’s Gospel (John 21:1-14) as well. The disciples still didn’t know what to think. They were confused by and about so many things. As they sat in their boat early in the morning, they thought it was just one of those bad nights of fishing. The man yelling to them from the shore was just another reminder that they hadn’t been successful. But their perspective changed when they followed his advice and pulled in a miraculous catch. They were seeing Jesus again, alive.

Their perspective changed when the risen Christ appeared to them. In both of these cases, people needed a reminder about all that Jesus had done. In both of these cases, they were taught that he had the power to change their lives.

Our sermon text this morning shows a unique perspective, a perspective provided to the Apostle John. And through his pen and the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, that perspective is shared with you and me. This is the unique perspective: a look inside the very throne room of God in heaven through the vision that God granted John.

John’s natural perspective was very different. He was in exile on an island. And the natural perspective of John’s first readers was similar. Their perspective was fear of further persecution wherever they might go. Their beloved apostle had been taken from them, and who knows what they might face next.

The vast difference between that natural perspective and the heavenly one is the very reason God gave such a glorious vision to his apostle. He wanted to offer hope and comfort. He wanted to change the perspective of John and of other troubled believers.

And that’s why we consider this grand vision today, that we might gain a perspective that is so often missing in our lives. We might describe it this way: our perspective is often way too narrow. We focus on specific things, like today’s troubles and tomorrow’s worries. We get caught up in past regrets, and we fear the future that may be ahead. We look at our life here on earth and see what we need to do, what we have done, and what’s going to be expected of us without keeping in mind so much of the context of our lives.

And God peels back the curtain that hides heaven from us now on earth, and he gives us this new perspective: God sits on his throne. He is in control. He rules and reigns over all things. Through faith in him and in his Son Jesus Christ, we have the ultimate victory and the ultimate hope. We have eternal victory and eternal hope.

Let’s consider the context of the words of our text. As mentioned earlier, John was in exile on the island of Patmos when God gave him the series of visions recorded in Revelation. In the first vision, he saw Jesus and was instructed by him to write a letter to each of seven churches. These letters warned the churches about their sins and unfaithfulness, encouraged them by praising their good deeds, and most importantly gave them the assurance of the Lord’s faithful love.

Then John stepped into the throne room. God, who sits on his throne, brought out a scroll that was sealed with seven seals, and John wept because no one could open the seals. No one could look into the future known only to God. But then in the middle of God's throne stood the lamb—as John describes it, **“looking as if it had been slain.”** He was worthy. He was the only one worthy to open the seals. And we have no problem recognizing the symbolism behind this lamb. This is Jesus, the one who was slain on the cross for the sins of the world and yet who lives forever and ever.

He stands there on God's throne when the scene plays out in John's vision that is described in our sermon text. Listen again: **Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.**

Worthy is the lamb. He is worthy to open the seals, yes, but he is worthy of so much more. He deserved all the praise that the universe has to offer. And he receives it.

It comes first from the angels encircling the throne—angels too numerous to count. One of the Greek words here is the one from which we get our word “myriad.” This is a myriad of angels, or really “myriads of myriads” and even more, because this is on top of thousands of thousands. You get the impression that the Greek is saying “Zillions,” more than anyone could even attempt to count. This is to Christ's glory that countless angels attend him with their praises. They speak of his worthiness to have all things: power and strength, wealth and wisdom, and honor and glory and praise. Why? Because he was slain. Because he humbled himself to do the work that the Father set before him, and he did it. Because he went into the world that had been broken and defeated by sin and he rescued and restored it.

And now the world joins in offering the praise that the lamb deserves. The next voice that John hears comes from **“every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them.”** No one, and perhaps nothing at all, is excluded from giving Christ the praise that he deserves. And even the four living creatures that John has previously seen, speak their “Amen.” And the 24 elders representing the Church fell down and worshiped.

Do you see the perspective that God is sharing with us through John? This is a heavenly perspective, a spiritual perspective. As glorious as the vision of countless angels singing their praises may be, that glory is surpassed by the lamb on his throne. As tremendous as the voice of all of creation joining in their praises may be, it is exceeded by the majesty of the one to whom everyone bows in worship. For Christians caught up in everyday, earthly things, this is a reminder that by our good works we share in giving praise to the lamb. Our songs of praise even now are joining with those of the angels in heaven as we present them before God's throne. All that we do as God's redeemed children shouts this message: Worthy is the lamb! He has redeemed us by his blood. He has made us his own. He has risen from death. He will bring us to his side forever.

And so when we see our light and momentary troubles, we take them to the lamb in prayer. We trust that he hears and answers and will help us through them. When we worry about the future, we remember that the lamb is already there, watching over all things for our good, ruling on his throne. When we are troubled by our past, we recall that the lamb was slain for our sins so that they are removed from us forever. And even when we stare in the face of death itself, we look to the lamb who was slain, but now lives and reigns forever.

May God grant us this heavenly perspective. May God strengthen us in our faith until the day when we don't need visions like this to remind us of the truth. May God keep us firm until that day when we join with all who surround Christ's heavenly throne and offer our praises forever: “Worthy is the lamb.”

The Text: Revelation 5:11–14 (NIV84)

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they sang:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.