

“Worthy is the Lamb!”—The Vulnerability of God

Thomas Robinson, *Worthy! I*, August 18, 2013

Revelation 5:1-14

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** [Gen 49:9; Isa 11:10], 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, [Exo 19:6]
and they shall **reign on the earth.**” [Dan 7:27]*

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.

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ Now the **LORD said to Abram**, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And **I will make of you a great nation**, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**”

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 17

¹⁴ For **the love of Christ controls us**, because we have concluded this: that **one has died for all**, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might **no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised**.... ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a **new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, **the new has come**.

A Lamb Standing as Slain

We're caught between what we think we ought to be and the reality we feel. On many levels:

As parents, employers/-ees, artists, spouses, students, friends, helpers, teachers, Christians.

We're inadequate, faking it. We feel shame and fear. Use masks, denial. They'll find out! We protect ourselves from being seen, known, hurt, committed. It's dangerous to love. We can talk to ourselves to change. But the Gospel gives us more than self-help, self-talk. It gives God's reality and power.

Revelation: Symbolic, visionary glimpse of the end of the story. How do you symbolize God's power and victory? Lion? Lamb? Slain...standing? Why this image? It is chosen, purposeful. It encapsulates God's story and character culminating in Jesus. The Lamb sits on God's throne. They are one [Rev 7:17; 22:1]. What is worthy? What is real, true, lasting, worth living for? God shows us in his person, his choices, his revelation of himself in history and scripture.

Choosing Something Better than Perfection

When we think of the God of the universe philosophically, we easily become abstract. God must be perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing. Perfect means unchangeable, no emotions, no story. All-powerful = all-controlling, no free will. All-knowing = everything is fixed in advance. Profound tension. Not the Bible story. If God wills everything, he's responsible for evil. Why pray, if God never interacts with us? Many objections to Christian faith are functions of our abstractions.

God has all power and could control everything. But he shows that something else is more central, matters more to God. Love is God's own nature. In Trinity, God has relationship at his heart. God values love and relationship more than control, more than immutable perfection. God redefines perfection and power: The slain Lamb: A Love so engaged he gives himself—vulnerable—to give life.

The God Who Risks for Love

God shows us who he is and what's important through the complex story of his relationship with humanity in the scripture. There's much metaphorical language, little abstraction.

God does not have to be vulnerable; he chooses to make himself vulnerable in creation, limiting his control, giving human creatures freedom. He makes possible both good and evil.

With Abraham, God makes promises for all humanity to deal with the deepest problems of humanity.

All before Abram does anything. With Israel, God acts in the Exodus, delivers them before giving a covenant and Torah. He stays in relationship in spite of rebellion.

In Jesus, the messiah, representative servant of all Israel, he brings his promises and covenant to a climax beyond what anyone could have imagined. He also brings creation and Humanity's story to a climactic turning point. He is Israel and all of us. He comes as God and the lowliest human. He is our atonement, not placating God's anger toward us, but embodying God's love for us in spite of our self-destroying violence, pettiness, corruption, immorality.

Growing A People of Authentic Love

God knows how hard it is to be vulnerable in real love. But he also knows that that is where true life is.

He challenges us to it. We're defensive, scared to death. He loves us, holds on to us.

But you can't grow without risk. He's really got us, but in a way that we still experience as risk, as faith, as trust. He knows all my guilt, my worst, my cowardice. He hates all those things because they ruin me. But in Jesus he condemns sin, not me. Rather he renews me, his beloved child, trusting him.

When I see and trust his love, put my weight down on it, then I throw off my shame. I start helping him fight my guilt by repentance. I open my heart to his Holy Spirit. If God loves me, I must be, am worthy! If he gives me his Spirit, then my life must be, is really valuable. I don't have to prove it to you or anybody, even myself. God's got me. That's plenty. That's eternal. That's now.