

## Ascension Day

### Text: Revelation 5 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup>And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" <sup>3</sup>But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. <sup>4</sup>I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. <sup>5</sup>Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." <sup>6</sup>Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup>He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup>And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. <sup>10</sup>You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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!" <sup>13</sup>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!" <sup>14</sup>The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

### *All of Heaven Kneels*

Throughout this year's lenten and Easter season, we were looking at various people who knelt before Jesus. In tonight's first reading we see how all of heaven knelt before Jesus at His ascension. This evening's Gospel lesson showed the earthly side of Jesus' ascension into heaven. The Lord took His disciples to the vicinity of Bethany. He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was doing that, He was taken up to heaven. That is the earthly side of Jesus' ascension, men watching the Lord being raised into the sky.

Revelation 5 shows us a glimpse of what happened the same day in heaven. It shows the coronation of Jesus at His ascension into heaven and describes the celebration that began that day and will continue through all eternity. Today I would like to look at how all of heaven knelt when the Lord returned in triumph.

I. The scene begins with some fear and suspense.

John sees the Father seated on a throne with a scroll in His right hand. God's right hand is important because it was by His right hand that He delivered His people from evil in the Bible. In the Song of Moses after God delivered His people at the Red Sea, Moses sang, "*Your right hand O Lord was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy... You stretched out Your right hand*

*and the earth swallowed them.*” (Ex 15:7,12) The destiny of God’s people was written on the scroll, but it was sealed. What would be the future of God’s people? Would they be wiped out? Would God not come to the aid of His people as He had done in the past?

A mighty angel began to proclaim in a loud voice, “*Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?*” But no one was found to take the scroll and reveal its contents, not even any of the angels in heaven. The future of God’s people remained in doubt.

So John began to weep bitterly. It is important to understand John’s predicament at the time. He was given this revelation about the year 95 AD. He was the last of the apostles. All the other apostles had already been martyred for their faith. It began with John’s own brother James, whom King Herod had put to death. John was the last one left, and he was in exile on the island of Patmos. In addition to that, all Christians were undergoing a severe persecution at this time. The Roman empire was trying with all its might to destroy Christianity. To make matters even worse, false teachers were arising, who were leading many people astray. One of them that John often mentions in Revelation are the Nicolaitans. False teaching, persecution and even apathy among some Christians were bringing the future of God’s people into doubt. What would happen to those who confessed Christ as their Savior?

That is still how we as Christian often feel today. We look at things from the perspective of this world. We see the struggles of Christ’s Church and His people. We see the shame that those who bear Christ’s name often endure. Sin and temptation are all around us. There is false teaching bombarding us from every direction, and we see many people are led astray. We are tempted to weep like John. We might even wonder whether God can and will deliver His people.

Then an elder came with some comfort. In chapter 4 John saw 24 elders dressed in white with golden crowns, who were seated around the throne of God. The number 24 is the sum of the patriarchs in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New Testament. This person who came to John was a person who died and was now in heaven, possibly one of the patriarchs or apostles. He had overcome. He told John, “*Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.*”

II. Then John saw Christ take His place at the right hand of His Father.

Notice how all of heaven fell down when Jesus returned. He took the scroll from the Father. As soon as He did that the four living creatures around the throne and these 24 elders fell down in worship. They began to sing a new song. In the Old Testament new songs were always composed when God saved His people. Jesus return to heaven celebrated the greatest act of salvation ever.

Heaven fell down in worship and song because He was worthy to take the scroll. Our future is now in Jesus’ hands. Heaven new songs tells of that salvation. It begins “*You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.*” Jesus had now ascended back into His glory in heaven as the victorious Savior of Heaven and earth. He had been slain, but His shed, innocent blood redeemed us from all of our sins. Heaven might have mourned when Jesus was rejected,

beaten, crucified and dead, but He rose from the dead. On this day He returned. He took His place at the right hand of the Father. That is why heaven fell down in worship and song. When you think about it, most people on earth don't even know that it is Ascension Day. On the other hand, heaven has not stopped celebrating since that great day. Ascension Day began a new era of celebration in heaven because Jesus returned home as the victor.

As the One who took the scroll, He rules everything for the good of His people. The second part of that song says, "*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and **they will reign on the earth.***" That second part seems strange, "They will reign on the earth." These are the people whom John witnessed being martyred and persecuted for their faith. How could that song say that Christ's church is reigning on this earth? We might also doubt that sentence as we consider how the church is threatened today. But the church was reigning then, and it is still reigning today. Jesus took that scroll and rules all things for the good of His people. Verse 7 says that He had seven horns. That describes His omnipotence, that He is all-powerful. It also says that He has seven eyes. This is the Seven-fold Spirit whom He sent out on the earth on Pentecost. The Church outlasted the Roman Empire that tried to destroy it, and we are not even sure what the Nicolaitans taught as they threatened the church at that time taught with their false teaching, because that movement quickly died out. But by the power of His Word, our Lord's church continues to grow and spread throughout the world yet today. We can even look at our own congregation as an example. Things have changed a lot around Benediction in the last 50 years. Sometimes we might even wonder what the future of our congregation will be, but the Lord's Word continues to grow and spread from this place. Even in our personal lives, the Lord reigns with His forgiveness and His power. He takes away our sins, works all things for our good, and is now preparing a place for us, that we will one day celebrate with Him in His glory.

A number of years ago there was a television show called "Lamb-Chop." It ended with an annoying song that never ended called "The Song that Never Ends." Our text today also has a song that never ends, but it's not annoying. It is the most joyous song that has ever been sung. It began this day when heaven knelt in worship as our Lord reclaimed His place in heaven. May God fill our hearts with faith in Christ, that we will also one day be a part of that throng that still sings,

To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

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