

# Revelation 5:14

## *Singing a New Song*

As I read about the early church fathers and some of the martyrs in the early church I often wonder what compelled them to be so brave in the midst of impending death, like being burned at the stake, thrown to the lions, crucified, and even beheaded. There was something inside these men that compelled them to sacrifice their life. Today I want us to discover it as we look through this text, Revelation 5:1-14.

In the year 165 AD there was a church father and Christian apologist named Justin Martyr. Now Justin was not the first martyr, nor is that his actual last name. He was given the honorary title, Justin the Martyr, after his death.

He made it his practice to write apologetic letters to Roman Emperors, like Marcus Aurelius, to refute the notion that Christians were atheists. Remember the Romans thought Christian were atheists, not because they did not believe in God—but because they didn't believe in the Roman gods.

So Justin, who grew up in a home steeped in Hellenistic religion, often sought to persuade the Romans to change their minds in order to prevent more Christian killings. But the Romans, who felt Christians were trying to overthrow the Roman state, were even more focused on extinguishing them permanently. Here is the last conversation, Justin the Martyr had with a Roman prefect before he was martyred. He was ordered to sacrifice to the Roman gods, which of course, he refused to do.

The prefect Rusticus said: "If you do not do as you are commanded you will be tortured without mercy". Justin said: "*We hope to suffer torment for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so be saved. For this will bring us salvation and confidence as we stand before the more terrible and universal judgment-seat of our Lord and Savior*".

The prefect Rusticus pronounced sentence, saying: "Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and to obey the command of the emperor be scourged and led away to suffer capital punishment according to the ruling of the laws". Glorifying God, the holy martyrs went out to the accustomed place. They were beheaded, and so fulfilled their witness of martyrdom in confessing their faith in their Savior.

So, why did these Christian leaders willingly surrender their life like in such a manner? It had something to do with singing a new song, more on that later. Let's begin with verse 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.***

### **I. The Unfolding of History Written and Sealed by the Father**

#### **a. It is in His Right Hand**

The right hand is a metaphor in ancient literature that signifies power, prominence and position. This is where we get the expression "I want you to be my right hand man." This theme is used throughout Scripture to represent power.

The scene of the Father on the Throne is important in light of the Roman Emperors who also sat upon the throne and claimed deity while demanded worship. In John's vision he describes the father as reflecting utter radiance in hue along with complete omnipotence as his throne is surrounded by thunder, lightening, and continuous worship. John definitely wants to project to his persecuted readers that the throne of the Father dwarfs all emperors and kings anywhere in the world. The first image we have in the text before is one of the

Father on the throne with a scroll in His right hand. The right hand was a symbol in the ancient world of power.

- The signet ring was worn on the right hand of the king (Jeremiah 22:24).
- The right hand is used to bestow the highest blessing for the firstborn. (Genesis 48:18-19)
- The disciples gave Barnabus and Paul the right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:9)
- When Jesus was crucified they put in his right hand a staff to mock him as king (Matthew 27:29).
- Jesus proved worthy to be seated at the right hand of the father (Psalm Acts 2:34-35; Colossians 3:1)
- In Revelation, Jesus holds the seven stars in his right hand (Revelation 1:20).
- In Habakuk the cup of wrath is said to be in God's righthand.

So the right hand represents power, honor, and special privilege. John tells us that in the powerful right hand of the father was this important scroll and it had some unique features.

## **b. The Scroll: Its Description**

### **1. Writing on front and Back**

Here in chapter five we find a scroll in God's right hand. It is described as one that has writing throughout the front and back, which appears to be symbolic to mean that God's plan for the end times is so comprehensive that it required a scroll with writing on both the front and back.

### **2. The meaning of the Seven Seals**

The fact that it is sealed with seven seals means that the plan is complete and there can be no more revisions. As Stevie Wonder used to sing, "It is signed, sealed, and delivered." But there is still a problem. Verse 2.

***2 And I saw a strong angel (Notice the emphasis on power in God's presence) 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.***

### **3. The Weeping disciple**

The opening of the scroll means that future events pertaining to God's judgment will begin to unfold. If no one can open it then the plan cannot be set in motion. Therefore, the opening of the scroll begins the process of what will take place. This is why John wept.

The thought of God's people experiencing persecution, with nothing to look forward to, was too much to contain his emotional outburst, regardless if he was in heaven. The reality of this did not just make John weep...it made him weep loudly! That is how troubling the situation was to him. But the story does not end there. There is good news, which is always associated with Jesus.

## **II. Christ: The Only One who is Worthy**

***5 And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, 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.***

### **a. The Description: The Lion and the Lamb**

1. The Lion of Judah; the Root of David
2. The Lamb that was Slain
3. Before His Resurrection he was the Lamb; Revelation he is the Lion

Jesus is the lion of Judah and yet he is the lamb that stands before the throne of the Father. The lion is known for its fierce demeanor while the lamb for its vulnerable disposition. You could not have two more opposite extremes in the animal kingdom. But Jesus is described in Scripture as both the lion and the lamb.

Most are familiar with the lamb imagery; but many tend to forget that in Revelation he is also a lion! You can imagine as the early church faced persecution, some devoured by lions themselves, clinging to the lion of Judah for their source of encouragement.

Keep in mind, John's revelation gave them a glimpse of what *must* take place in heaven. The scroll is the recorded history and future of the church. It reveals what will happen to God's people, what will happen to the wicked, and how the martyred saints will eventually get their opportunity to experience redemption. As we mentioned, since it is sealed, written on both sides, there can be no revisions. The future as far as God's plan is concerned is a done deal. Honestly, knowing this reality kept martyrs like Justin moving forward.

*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.*

### **III. The Heavenly Worship of the Lamb**

- a. The Living Creatures & the Angels: Instant Worship & Recognition
- b. Our Problem with Worship: Sin and Low View of Jesus
- c. We were Created to Worship; but have inverted it (Romans 1:21-23)
  1. Relationships
  2. Athletes, Musicians, Entertainers
  3. Money, Wealth and Possessions
- d. Sinless Creatures and Elders show how Worship was supposed to be from the Beginning

So the four living creatures and Elders demonstrate the reality that we were meant to worship, but they have the correct view of Jesus. They are in awe of him. Notice how John describes the worship bestowed on Christ.

**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,  
and they shall reign on the earth.”**

So what is it that motivates these heavenly creatures and elders to worship Jesus? What was it that allowed the martyrs of the early church to sacrifice their lives? Why do Christians in China and other countries of the world sacrifice their lives for Jesus? It is because they desired *to sing a new song!* A new

song is used in Scripture to denote relief and positive change. These martyrs would preach the gospel in hopes that their enemies would sing a new song. They also wanted to experience life in heaven with Jesus and looked forward to that new song as well. In fact, some martyrs, like Johan Huss, actually sang (Son of David) until the fire consumed him and took his life.

A new song represents change, a new beginning, relief, or happiness that has been discovered. When something wonderful happens, often our first desire is to sing and dance, even those who have no harmony no rhythm.

So why were the elders singing a new song. Because the scene shifted from grief (no one could open the scroll) to joy (But Jesus was worthy). The Lamb was found worthy to open the scroll, which meant the fate of the future was now set in motion. Ultimately, John wanted to communicate, it was going to be alright for God's people. What was the content of this new song they sang?

#### **IV. The New Song: Its Content**

- a. He was Ransomed for Us
- b. Now there is Racial Diversity in heaven
- c. Kingdom Priests: We are in God's court and can approach Him
- d. The Practical Reality: We Need New Songs in our Life

#### **v. The Final Crucenda: All Participate in Worshipping Jesus**

- a. The Four Creatures and Elders
- b. The Myriads of Angels
- c. Every Creature that Exists (Romans 8:19-22)
- d. Northside Church

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.

As you can see, heaven is a place where Jesus finally gets his due worship. It is a place where sin will not impede our worship; it will not undermine his significance in our life. Everyone will worship the Lamb, unhindered, voluntarily, and with gratitude. Not because he was a dictator like many of the Roman Emperors—but because he loved us enough to be slain as for our sin. In the end, we all should be singing new songs for Jesus.

If you do not know Jesus, I encourage you to trust the fact that he died for your sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. He did this because he loved you. Make no mistake about it, Jesus wants you to sing that new song of trusting in Jesus. So if you haven't trusted in Jesus as your Absolute Savior, maybe it is time for you to finally begin singing that new song. The apostles did it, the martyrs did it, and you can do it as well.