

## The Ultimate Valentine (Revelation 5:1-14 February 14, 2010)



This week – I had my first Twitter experience. To help me prepare for this sermon – I Googled a random name – the first one that came into my head – (it will remain anonymous) – and the word Twitter.

Up popped a bunch of people around the world with that name, who had Twitter accounts – so I picked the one from the Gold Coast.

Lo and behold – I found days worth of Tweets filled with such life changing information as – when he showered, what he ate for breakfast and lunch, what he thought of Avatar, which bands he is looking forward to listening to at Soundwave.

As I read these Tweets, I found myself asking – who would want to read this? – does anyone actually read these Tweets? – does he actually *think* anyone reads these Tweets – that somehow – someone in Norway logs on expectantly each day to be enthralled by such gems as:

I'm bored man.

I think I smell and need a shower.

Just had a mean feed @ hungry jacks – yo.

Now I am *really* bored!

And if anyone does read them – I would like to know why? Maybe there is a generation that communicates with this kind of small talk in the public arena – for reasons that simply pass me by. They are friends – so the minutiae of their day is somehow interesting to them.

However, some part of me thinks that much of the popularity of Facebook and Twitter and Google's new social networking site – Buzz – is the need to tell the world about us. We want to leave our mark on history – we need the world to know that we lived – and were important – somehow.

That 100 years after we have gone – someone will know about us – our lives will have counted for something.

For many it is sobering to think that after we die – all we are is soon forgotten.

Most of us know nothing about our great, great grandparents – except possibly their name and a few details grandma passed on.

Most of us think along the lines of the words of William Shakespeare from the 3<sup>rd</sup> act of *Julius Caesar*:

The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.

If you do something really evil – people notice – but live a normal, boring life, you pass unnoticed into history.

People remember Lee Harvey Oswald – but not the faithful family man who lived and died in anonymity. So they want some record of their life to survive.

This morning, I want to remind you of what should be a very sobering truth. The reality is that when you die – you do **not** vanish – your deeds are **not** forgotten. Listen to Ecclesiastes 12:14:

God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good **or** evil.

God knows everything you did – good or evil – and it **will** be made known.

Revelation 20:12:

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, *according to what they had done*.

The deeds of men are **not** interred with their bones. Who you are and what you did does not disappear with your death. All you are is recorded in the book of the Lord – ready for the final day.

Those who might be anonymous to history – are known in eternity – in fact every thought and deed is known.

The church has long recognised that some saints who lived godly lives are unknown in this world – but God knows them and their deeds.

And one man who exemplifies this is Valentine – the Valentine that Valentine’s Day is named after.

You might think he is a famous saint – famous for love – but in truth we know almost nothing about him. The only thing we know for certain is that in 496 AD, Pope Gelasius I, issued a list of martyrs “... whose names are justly revered among men, but whose acts are known only to God.”

And one of the names on this list of martyrs whose deeds have long been forgotten among men was Valentine.

Historians have tried to identify him. Some thought he was a priest in Rome. Others a bishop of Interamna. Some identified him as an African martyr.

In reality, we have no idea who he was or what he did – but Gelasius was right about one thing – his acts are **known** to God.

Today is Valentine’s Day – and in honour of this day – I want to remind you of these truths.

When we are gone and forgotten – our acts are known by God – and because our acts are known by God – we would be lost eternally – except for the greatest love story in history.

Today is Valentine’s Day and since this is a day associated with love – I want to remind us – of the ultimate act of love – the ultimate Valentine. In a sense what you saw in the baptisms is a picture of this act of love.

Let me begin by reminding you that while our acts are known to God, we need to remember that this is not a good thing.

When the list of our acts are examined – everyone will have the same result – fail!

Romans 3:23 says:

For **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And because we have failed and fallen short of the glory of God – we are in deep trouble.

Revelation 20:12-15:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

If there is no one whose deeds are acceptable to God. If we all fall short of the glory of God – then death is a really big deal.

But in that Revelation 20 passage there is a ray of hope.

If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

This means that there **are** names written in the book of life – who escape the lake of fire.

So how do you escape the lake of fire?

To me – the story of how anyone escapes the lake of fire is the most exciting and significant event in history.

And it is summarized in the chapter we are memorizing as a church – Revelation 5. This is my favourite chapter of the Bible.

While only the saints hail this act today – the day will come when the whole created order, angels and men, dead and alive – will recognise that one act of love – is indeed the true great Ultimate Valentine.

Look with me at Revelation 5 verse 1:

Revelation 5:1:

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 wish I had the time to unpack all that is contained in the line – Him who sat on the throne. Revelation 4 describes God the Father at His most awesome. Surrounded by the most powerful of all created beings. Arrayed in majesty and splendour and power. A God who is transcendent – a God no man would dare consider approaching.

But now John notices something. God the Father has in his hand a scroll.

Scrolls were made of papyrus made from many strips painstakingly and laboriously joined together to make one scroll around 10 metres in length.

Scrolls were costly and only used to record important information.

However, despite the cost, scrolls were normally only written on one side. On the front side of the scrolls the strips of papyrus were laid horizontally. On the back side they were laid vertically.

This meant it was easy to write on the front, but difficult to write on the back. There was no smooth surface for the quill to write on. So the usual practice was to only write

on the front. But if you had a lot to say or wanted a certain document on one scroll, then you wrote on the back as well.

God the Father is on His throne – chapter 4 describes this as a place of absolute power – separate from His creation and He has a scroll – in His right hand – the hand of power. In the following chapters we find that this scroll was the scroll of the purposes of God in judgment and redemption. This is the plan of God for the salvation of man.

It is how God rights the wrongs. How He makes all things to work together. Judgment on the wicked. Redemption for His people. Restoring the world. Undoing the fall. Saving His people from the lake of fire and bringing them into eternity.

This plan of judgment and redemption is so full, so extensive that the scroll is written on both sides.

When the writing of a scroll was finished, it was wound around two sticks. Then a single sheet of papyrus was wrapped around the whole scroll and this sheet was sealed with a wax seal. Some important scrolls were known to have more than one seal.

In this case, there is not just one seal – but seven seals. Seven suggests perfection. The perfection of the plan and the absolute inviolability of the scroll. This is the scroll of God – no man may open this scroll.

The writings of the day suggest that it is the slitting of the seals that brought into legal effect what is written on the scroll. What is contained within comes into effect when the seals are broken and the scroll read.

The scroll cannot be read until the seals are opened. God's plan for judgment and redemption can only begin when the seals are opened.

Verse 2:

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

This is a strong angel with strong voice. His challenge is uttered to the entire universe.

The angel booms, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

Who could possibly be able to put the divine plan into action? Who will begin the final series of events that will save men and restore the universe?

But at this point, the whole of chapter 4 comes into focus. The One holding the scroll is the most powerful and awesome being – God Himself in all His glory.

No one – angel or man – just walks up to this God and tries to open His scroll. This God is terrifying. Everything in chapter 4 is a barrier separating this God from His creation.

The layers around the throne – the crystal sea – the elders – everything separates God from His creation.

So the great question is – who is worthy? Who will bring God's purposes in judgment and blessing to pass? Who can enact the plan of God?

Verse 3:

And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.

No one in heaven – not even a mighty angel could do it. No one on earth – no one alive. No one under the earth – no one in the realm of the dead.

No created being could do it. Not only could no one open the scroll and enact the plan of God, no one could even look into this scroll.

Verse 4:

And I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

John is not weeping because he is curious and his curiosity is frustrated.

No! He weeps because in the flow of this vision, unless someone is found who can open the scroll – the purposes of God in judgment and redemption will be thwarted.

There will be no salvation – no one will escape the wrath of God. The deeds of men will mean every last one of us will be cast into hell to suffer forever.

The cosmos will continue groaning for redemption.

The creation is rendered futile.

**But**, verse 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."

There are any number of ways of referring to Christ. The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David – these are but two of them.

In King David, the Davidic dynasty was at its zenith. From that point on it was all downhill. Until in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, it was cut off entirely. What was left was a stump – Priests, Sadducees, Rabbis – but no one from the house of David on the throne of David.

But the Lion of Judah springs forth from the line of David to sit on the throne of David.

And this One, **He** is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.

What makes Him worthy? Because He has conquered?

But He did not conquer by a mighty army. He conquered by one great act of love.

Verse 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.

Follow what is going on here. The elder cried to John, “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.”

And John felt this surge of hope. He looked up toward the Lion – and he saw – a Lamb!

The Lamb is the Lion. The Lamb is the root of David.

Jesus Christ is King *and* Sacrifice.

That is the neat thing about apocalyptic literature, you can pile all these metaphors together.

But what he sees is no ordinary Lamb. This Lamb looks as if it is slain.

Do not miss this. In verse 5 we are told that the Lamb can open the book and its seven seals – *because He has conquered*.

How did He conquer? By being slain on Calvary. Verses 9-10:

“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.”

He is worthy because He was slain and purchased redemption by His blood.

At the climax of history – the focus of all history shifts to Calvary. For without Calvary, all human history is without worth. The plan of God is forfeit.

But because of Calvary – because of this great act of love – the plan of God can be enacted.

Calvary is the focus of human history – and it is so important that it is the only part of human history that enters eternity.

The Lamb who is worshipped for all eternity – is the Lamb who was slain.

A.W Tozer tells the story that one day a man came to him and declared, "I am Jesus Christ." Tozer took his hands and said where are the marks? Where are the marks? You are a fake and a fraud. For my Jesus has the marks in His hands.

After His resurrection, Jesus had the wounds – Thomas learned that. But did Christ need to keep the wounds? Did He have to appear as a Lamb slain?

No! But the cross is transformed from a badge of shame and horror to the wonder of the ages. The Lamb who was slain **is** the Lion of Judah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The Lamb who was slain is standing in the centre of the throne. This means that He did not come from outside the throne. He is one with Him who sits on the throne. He did not have to navigate the sea of glass and the seven lamps of fire and the thunder and lightning and the searing ranks of majestic angels to approach the throne.

He simply appears in the midst of the throne. He is one with God to begin with.

He never needed to leave the throne. He could have simply remained as the Son throughout all eternity.

But then no one could then open the scroll and the seals and you and I would perish – eternally. Jesus need not have become the Lamb and been slain.

Yet, because of love, He who is God, chose to leave and become like us and die to become the Lamb who is slain. A slaughtered Lamb. And as such, He is the marvel of the ages.

Not what we would think of as the marvel of the ages. When men want symbols of power they choose mighty earthbound animals. Britain chooses the lion, Russia the bear, America the eagle.

We chose the kangaroo and the emu – not the quokka and the koala.

It is only heaven that chooses a Lamb – and a slain Lamb at that – to represent the ultimate power. Meekness and majesty. Power and suffering.

But this Lamb is not a victim. This Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes.

Horns are a symbol of kingly authority. Seven horns means a perfection of kingly authority.

Eyes are a symbol of seeing, knowing and understanding. Seven eyes reflect perfect knowledge and understanding.

Back in Genesis 1 – the Spirit of God was sent through out the earth and performed seven acts of seeing. The Lamb knows everything that has happened throughout creation.



This Lamb was slain, but has come back to life and has all kingly authority, all knowledge and is one with the very throne of God.

The Jews had often thought of themselves as lambs – part of the flock of God. In the days of Antiochus Epiphanes III some of the Jews began to organise and fight back. They became known as the lambs of God. Warrior lambs.

In this one Lamb – we have the symbols of sacrifice, warrior-kingship and omniscience.

Verse 7:

And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

Only He was able to do it for only He was worthy. And He alone was worthy because of Calvary.

Let me tell you something about that day. In that great day when the Lamb who was slain takes the scroll from the hand of God Almighty – no one will think of anything other than Calvary.

Every breath will be held – for if the Lamb cannot open the scroll – we are lost forever.

But He *is* worthy – and He *will* open the scroll.

Verse 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.

From this point in the book, again and again we find linked together – He who sits on the throne and the Lamb. Together – they are God. Author of redemption and Redeemer.

And they are worshipped.

Harps are instruments of joy. In Psalm 137, the Jews were encouraged to take up their harps and sing. But they were in captivity in Babylon, that was not a time of joy. How could they take up their harps and sing?

But in that day, it is a day of joy. Finally, God's purposes in history – redemption and judgment are to come to pass. And there will be outbreaks of joy.

Maybe you don't think of harps as instruments of joy. Maybe for you it is trumpets or bells – but the idea is a chorus of praise and joy.

And the prayers are prayers of praise and joy.

Psalm 141:2:

Let my prayer be counted as incense before you.

Our prayers are a sweet aroma. The prayers are praises for what God is going to do in judgment and redemption. The Lamb has triumphed therefore our prayers will be effective.

Verses 9-10:

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, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

This is a new song. So what is the old song?

At the end of chapter 4, a song was sung to God the Father. A song of praise to the Creator. Revelation 4:9-11:

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

The old song was a song of thanks for the Creator. In the Old Testament, when God did something new, the people were exhorted to sing a new song unto God.

And this is new. God as the Lamb – is slain that we might be redeemed. Now the focus of all creation moves to the Lamb. And there is a new song. A song of redemption.

God in Christ has done the most wonderful thing. Christ has triumphed in the cross so that the plan of God in judgment and redemption will come to pass.

Because of that, He is worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.

Why? Because He was slain. And He purchased for God with His blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. He has made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.

He can open the scroll **only** because He was slain and His blood purchased our freedom.

Suppose Christ had not died. Suppose there was no Lamb who died to take away the sin of the world. This text says that this means there would have been no one – no angel, no man, no one – who could open the book and the seals and bring the purposes of God to fruition.

It took one great act of love – the Ultimate Valentine – so that we might be saved.

None could pay the price for sin. Heaven would be empty. Our sin would have long since destroyed us.

But the Lamb did leave the throne. And He was slain. And God's purpose in history, God's purpose in redemption, God's purpose for you – are unleashed as the seals are slit and the scroll is opened.

No wonder the universe burst with praise.

Note what this verse says.

It was a bloody death – You purchased for God with Your **blood** *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Blood is a symbol for death. His death paid our ransom and set us free. His wounds for my soul.

Charles Wesley said it best:

Arise, my soul, arise.  
Shake off thy guilty fears.  
The bleeding sacrifice  
In my behalf appears.  
Before the throne my Surety stands.  
My name is written on His hands.

He ever lives above  
For me to intercede,  
His all redeeming love,  
His precious blood to plead.  
His blood atoned for all our race,  
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds He bears,  
Received on Calvary,  
They pour effectual prayers;  
They strongly plead for me.  
“Forgive him, oh, forgive,” they cry,  
“Nor let that ransomed sinner die.”

The Father hears Him pray,  
His dear Anointed One;  
He cannot turn away  
The presence of His Son.  
His Spirit answers to the blood,  
And tells me I am born of God.

My God is reconciled;  
His pard'ning voice I hear.  
He owns me for His child;

I cannot longer fear.  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
And "Father, Abba, Father," cry.

It is a bloody atonement. And it is all due to the five bleeding wounds He bears, received on Calvary.

It is an effective death. Men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation are purchased. Heaven is filled with men from every nation and time and place. His blood availed for them.

It is a purposeful death. They are purchased for God. The whole reason for creation and redemption is to have a people who will give glory to God throughout all the ages.

It is a triumphant death. Because of his death, we shall reign on the earth in triumph.

Verses 11-12:

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, 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!"

The Lamb is worthy to receive this seven-fold acknowledgment of his attributes. He was worthy before the cross. But the cross showed the selfless love, the sacrifice, the mercy, the grace of the Lamb. And all eternity with cry:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

This Lord's Day is a foretaste of glory. We gather this day to cry:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

Verse 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!"

The whole universe joins in the adoration of the Lamb.

The universe groans in travail awaiting the final day when the fall shall be reversed. And finally that day is come. In Colossians 1 we are told that Jesus shall reconcile all things to Himself.

Here we see the day when that happens. And the universe erupts in praise.

Verse 14:

And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

In the words of the great hymn of Samuel Davies:

Great God of wonders! all Thy ways  
Are matchless God-like and divine;  
But the fair glories of Thy grace  
More God-like and unrivalled shine:  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

Crimes of such horror to forgive,  
Such guilty, daring worms to spare;  
This is Thy grand prerogative,  
And none may in this honour share:  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

In wonder lost, with trembling joy  
We take the pardon of our God;  
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,  
A pardon bought with Jesus' blood:  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

O may this strange, this matchless grace,  
This God-like miracle of love,  
Fill the whole earth with grateful praise,  
And all th'angelic choirs above!  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

Let me repeat that last stanza:

O may this strange, this matchless grace,  
This God-like miracle of love,  
Fill the whole earth with grateful praise,  
And all th'angelic choirs above!  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

This God-like miracle of love.

Valentine's Day began with an unknown saint – whose deeds are known only by God.

Today – it is a day for lovers.

I trust you have something special in mind for the one you love. I am taking Dena out to lunch.

But, on this day – do not forget the greatest act of love in all history.

Jesus Christ – God Himself – became the Lamb slain. He laid down His life for us. He purchased us with His blood.

We don't have to wait for heaven to sing of the love of God – we don't have to wait for heaven to rejoice in our salvation. Today is the day.

The baptisms you witnessed this morning are a symbol of the love of God in saving us.

If you don't know Christ – then know this – your deeds are not interred with you. You will have to give an account before God – and you will not stand.

But there is hope – the Lamb was slain for you – if you accept His offer of life. Trust Him. Follow Him. Love Him and live.

May this Ultimate Valentines sustain you for all eternity.