The book of Revelation. It is really out there. It sounds completely outrageous when you read it. It is so out there that it brings all kinds of crazy ideas to people’s heads. I am sure it has to be the most diversely interpreted book of the New Testament era.

But despite how different and difficult it is, it still fascinates us. We just have to read it. I had a Bible Study on it a number of years ago that many attended. People were fascinated by it.

But, oh, when you read it! All that fantastic imagery - the beasts and the dragons and the supernatural riders on horseback! Creatures with six wings, seven heads, ten horns! Scrolls and bowls and plagues and trumpets – sometimes it is all a bit difficult to take in. Given how out-of-the-ordinary everything appears, you could even say that, at times, Revelation is even HARD TO BELIEVE.

I think our text is actually one of the tamer portions. But even so, we are told of thousands upon thousands, ten thousand times ten thousand angels, and a song spontaneously sung by every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea. And then there are the living creatures, which earlier are described as being covered with eyes all around, even under [each of his six] wings. One like a lion, one like an ox, one with the head of a man and the last was like a flying eagle. Pretty hard to believe, huh?

You do not know the half of it. You have to try to imagine how hard it would have been to believe any of this stuff back in John’s day, back when it was written. Only I am not talking about the fantastic imagery. Actually, that would have been easier for them to understand because they were more familiar with the Biblical symbolism John was employing than we are today. What they would have had difficulty believing was the message of all that symbolism.

Our text picks up at the end of a section in which John was crying. Before him is a scroll containing important information about the future of Christ’s church on earth. He is crying because the scroll is sealed with seven seals and no one in heaven or on earth is worthy to open it. Hard to believe?

No - especially when a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, comes and takes the scroll out of the Father’s hand in order to open it. Everyone, especially John, knew that Jesus was the Son of God and was therefore worthy to look into the future. Nobody would have mistaken that Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, for anyone else!

So if it is not the fantastic imagery and not the worthiness of the Lamb, what was it that John and his contemporaries would have had difficulty believing here in Revelation? It is the status that this chapter ascribes to Christians.

Our text is part of a great chorus of praise about the worthiness of the Lamb. This song of praise speaks, not only of the Lamb, but also of his followers. The elders who were gathered around God’s throne sang: 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. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

That is what is so hard to believe: a kingdom and priests? Reign on earth? Do you have any idea what it was like to be a Christian at the time John wrote this? They were being slaughtered! They were hunted! They had been kicked out of the synagogue by old-line Jews many decades before, and since then they had also managed to make enemies out of the emperors of Rome, they were being beaten, crucified and fed to lions! And now
they are supposed to believe themselves to be rulers over the earth? Hardly!

But that was the message. I can just imagine the sound of the 24 elders singing in John’s vision. I can almost hear their voices. I’m sure it is magnificent. I cannot imagine the song itself because I don’t know how the music went. But I can easily imagine a choir of 24 powerful, male voices. At our Seminary, we toured with 50 men!

But take a look at the text we are considering this morning and see if you can imagine the powerful sound of the choir that it describes: 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!

Now try to imagine the sound of the next chorus: 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.

Wow! Can you imagine that? Billions of voices - how powerful it must have been! But, more importantly, imagine how comforting it must have been for John and his fellow, persecuted Christians. God knew it was hard for this pitiful little band to think of themselves as holy priests and kings. But he made sure that message was loud, clear and unmistakable by having all creation proclaim in song that, no matter how bad things looked, Jesus was King over everything now and forever!

Each and every one of those billions of voices was an added reassurance of this truth for those poor, battered Christians of the first century after Christ. And I will tell you what else: each and every one of those voices singing of the power and wisdom and strength and honor and glory of the Lamb is a reassurance for us, too. Though we are not persecuted to the same degree that they were back then, lots of things make it hard for us to believe that we can think of ourselves on a daily basis as Easter victors.

You struggle with your weaknesses and sin. You look back on your failures and you think: I cannot believe I am not over this. I cannot believe I have fallen to this same temptation so many times in my life. You think: I can see how some people at church could think of themselves as part of a kingdom of powerful priests fighting sin, but not me. I’m pathetic. I’m just Joe-Average-Sinner who will never be one of those good Christians who make a name for Christ with their lives. I am just too far gone. I am a spiritual simpleton and a loser.

Actually, if you think that little of your own power to excel spiritually, then you are in an unusually good position to grow in comfort and in spiritual maturity from the billions of voices singing these songs. That is because they are not singing: Worthy are the super-saints. No, they are singing: Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain... to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!

Yours is not the power and the glory. It is his. And, as Scripture reminds us, He is faithful and just when we confess our sinfulness to him, and will purify us from all unrighteousness. Like the early church that did not see victory when they saw the overwhelming powers of persecution and oppression marching against them, we do not see victory in our life’s struggles. Our debts overwhelm us and belittle us. Our problems seem unfixable. We feel incapable. Our patterns of weakness seem unbreakable. Our
cowardice seems insurmountable. Our deadly habits seem un reformable - making us feel unfit for the Kingdom of God, as though the others belong but we will never quite be there.

Today we hear thousands upon thousands, ten thousand times ten thousand, billions upon billions, singing: **You are right!** We are not worthy of the Kingdom. But, oh, how worthy is the Lamb! And, as hard as it is to believe, that Lamb was slain for us, for our salvation, to purify unworthy us from all unrighteousness. And because he has risen from death to reign forever, we know that he was victorious over our death and we have spiritual life in him!

His alone is the power that deserves this earth-shaking swell of praise. But, as hard as it is to believe, who does he use that power for? For us! It is hard to believe because we are so unworthy to receive such attention from him, such gifts. But he is simply that gracious, his blood shed for us simply that powerful to remove the stain of sin. It is a **Revelation** that is hard to believe, but one that billions profess as true. Amen.

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