

"The Song Of The Lamb"

It is traditional and appropriate on Palm Sunday to focus on the crucifixion of Jesus and its tremendous implications for all our lives. In our series on *The Story of God and the Struggles of Life*, we've come to the last book in the Bible, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. This Palm Sunday morning we're going to see how Scripture puts the sacrifice of Jesus at the center of God's story and ours.

The Greek title for Revelation is *apokalypsis*. That word means an "unveiling." What we all need to see in the "unveiling" that takes place in Revelation is that while part of that has to do with the end of the world, that's not all of it. Revelation is also about the unveiling of the ultimate actual spiritual reality now: the way things really are beyond all our illusions, delusions, and denials. Revelation shows us that our vision is not just a little less than complete but dangerously narrow, fuzzy, clouded, and small. If we take to heart the vision Revelation gives us, it will give us hope and strength for here and now as well as for whatever is coming. This hope springs up out of the infinite depths of the love of God and his grace. There *will be* an end to the world as we know it. There will be an end to *this* world of injustice, and suffering, and emptiness, and death. There will be a new heavens and a new earth. That's the main point of **Revelation 5. *God's good purposes will triumph because of the sacrifice of Jesus. That's why He is worthy of all our worship.***

I. GOD'S PURPOSES WILL TRIUMPH BECAUSE OF JESUS

Revelation 4 ends with God, spectacularly mysteriously great and good and worthy of all worship. But what happens in **chapter 5:1-4**? John sees, in the right hand of God, *a scroll written within and on the back and sealed with seven seals. What does it mean? It means...*

A. God has a purpose for this world.

1. The scroll represents everything the rest of the book of Revelation will unfold. The writing on the inside and outside is a symbolic way of saying this is the fullness of all God wants and plans to do and there is a lot to it. It includes the judgments, but it ends with every tear wiped away. This plan of God cannot be revealed, unrolled, accomplished unless there is someone worthy to break the seals. Now, look at the drama in the vision. In **verse 2**, John sees a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, *“Who is worthy to open the scroll and break the seals?”* And no one in all of creation is worthy. Twice it says: “no one.” And he begins to *weep loudly*. This is not just a tear that forms in the corner of his eye. John was sobbing because He knows, without being told, how important this is. This is the fullness of God's plan, God's salvation for humankind and planet earth. Without the fulfillment of God's plan, represented by this scroll, all the struggles and sorrows and suffering will be worse than meaningless, earth will be a wasteland, and all of humanity lost eternally. No one and nothing will be redeemed.

We could all weep over that, but we don't have to because...

B. God's purposes will be fulfilled.

Look at **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.”* The reference to the Lion of the tribe of Judah comes from the first book in the Bible: Genesis. In **Genesis 49**, when Israel blessed his sons, he pictured Judah as a lion, and he prophesied that a perpetual royal dynasty of kings would come from his descendants. Later, when God chose David from the tribe of Judah to be king, the prophecy was moved forward. When the Jews went into captivity in Babylon, David's dynasty looked like a tree that had been cut down, leaving only the root and stump. But then Isaiah prophesied that a shoot would come from that seemingly dead stump, and a fruitful branch would grow from that seemingly dead root. (**Isaiah 11:1,10**) This is why in the Bible, a big point is made that Jesus is from the tribe of Judah and the family of David. His life was the fulfillment of prophecies. This entire unfolding story has taken place in the context of spiritual warfare, so it doesn't just say he can open the scroll. It says, *“he has conquered, so that he*

can open the scroll with its seven seals.” Let that sink in. It's easy to focus on the strange scroll, the mighty angel, and the twenty-four elders. The interesting thing is scholars don't all agree on all the details, but pretty much everyone sees the main point here: The scroll, which represents the fulfillment of God's purposes, gets opened because of the victory of Jesus. There is a plan that God has for the world. An enemy opposed it. A battle was fought. Jesus won.

I woke up Saturday morning, went online, and looked at the crazy sad newsfeed. I read about the fifty-plus civilians killed while waiting for a train and hoping to evacuate from a part of Ukraine the Russians were approaching. I saw an article about two airline passengers arrested for kicking, biting, and assaulting other passengers and flight attendants. There was also an ongoing commentary on the slap at the Oscars. I checked my email and got an update on some difficult relationship heartaches. I had a text reminding me of four friends struggling with cancer and needing prayer. My two favorite kinds of music these days are blues songs and hymns of praise. There's no contradiction. The blues tap into the heartache and longing for a better world. The hymns celebrate that promise that a better world is coming because God has a purpose for the world, and God's purpose will be fulfilled.

But there is a surprise in this vision that is meant to make an impression. It's not just that God's purposes will triumph but also that.

II. GOD'S PURPOSES TRIUMPH THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS AS THE LAMB OF GOD.

In **verse 5**, John *hears* the *Lion* has conquered and can open the scroll. In **verse 6**, he *sees a lamb*. **Revelation 5** unveils a picture of Jesus in heaven, being worshipped and adored and declared to be worthy of praise because he is the Lamb that was slain. There are many memorable characters in Revelation. There are the four horsemen, the beast, the false prophet, the great prostitute, the dragon, the two witnesses, and others, they are all memorable, but they are not the main actors. Do you know who is at the center of the whole story? The Lamb! In the book of Revelation, the word, or name, “*Jesus*” is used fourteen times. But “*the Lamb*” appears thirty times. This is the dominant title and image for Jesus in Revelation.

A. Jesus is the Lamb who was slain.

In the book of **Exodus**, the Bible tells the story of Passover. On the night before God's people were to be led out of their slavery in Egypt, God told Moses to have each family take a perfect lamb and sacrifice it. They were to mark the doorposts of the house with the blood of the Lamb and then gather inside in small groups to eat the Lamb together. When God sent judgment on his enemies, the judgment would pass over those who believed God's promises. They would be saved under the sign of the sacrifice because they believed God's promises of grace. From this point on, perfect lambs were sacrificed and offered to God. *Why? Why all these sacrifices? It was to teach and prepare people for the coming of Jesus. **These sacrifices taught people the seriousness of sin.** God was saying: "I will forgive your sins, but so that you won't misunderstand the seriousness of sin or the cost of forgiveness, I will require that you offer these animals as symbolic sacrificial substitutes as if my judgment for your sin was falling on them."* There are spiritual laws that govern our life and our destiny, and our relationship with God. Our sins create a debt to God's justice that has to be paid. The debt we owe is too big for any of us to pay down. Our only hope is that there is a redeemer who will pay our debt for us. That's the hope pictured through the lambs that were sacrificed.

What the sacrifices pictured the Prophets put into words. Isaiah 53:6-7 *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.* God wanted people to understand his plan for salvation and the meaning of the death of his Son. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus, he said: "*Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*" (**John 1:29, 36**)

1. Jesus is not just powerful as the Lion but as the Lamb. Look at *this* Lamb in **verse 6**: it has been slain, yet it is standing. It has seven horns and seven eyes. Horns represent power and eyes knowledge. In

Revelation, seven is the perfect number, so this Lamb is all knowing and all-powerful, and it has been slain, and yet it is very much alive. Jesus as the Lion is powerful but as the Lamb he is powerful too.

2. Verses 9-10 say, ***Jesus is not just saving a people who will avoid judgment by his grace but a people from every tribe and nation who will be kings on the earth.*** A people who will serve as priests and who will reign as royalty.

B. God's purposes triumph through Jesus' sacrifice.

What this means for us is twofold...

1. God's victory is certain. It isn't dependent on God winning some future battle with evil. The Lion, who is the Lamb, who sees all things and has all power and to whom we pray - that's the symbolism of the bowls of incense - already holds the scroll of destiny in his hands. It's going to all be unfolding according to God's plan because of Jesus and the cross! It's finished in more ways than one. *Jesus as the Lamb not only saves people. He saves everything.* His death is the reason God's purposes will be fulfilled, creation renewed, and good triumph.

I know someone who told about a horrific nightmare. In it, his entire family was slaughtered. It seemed so real, but when he woke up, his family was fine. He said, *"When I woke up after the dream, the nightmare in which I thought I had lost them, I got them back again. I couldn't even look at them without crying—for sheer joy."* He said, *"Having gotten them back after losing them made the experience of having them infinitely greater."* **Revelation 5** gives people who may sometimes find that life is like a bad dream a vision of what it will be like to wake up from out of this present world and to clearly see the total victory of Jesus and the purposes of God fully fulfilled. If your life doesn't have any sorrow in it, now be thankful for that but know the world is under a very real curse, and there is a lot of sin and suffering still. If and when you see that side of life or when you go through it, you need to know that God's purposes are going to be fulfilled. It doesn't always look or feel like that in the present. It didn't in the days when the descendants of David looked like the dead stump of a once great tree. It did not look good when Palm Sunday turned into Good Friday. It will

not look good in the time of the final traumas of human history. But Jesus has already won the decisive battle, and God's purposes will triumph. If that were not the case, we should all be weeping. Since that *is* the case, we can rejoice and worship with the angels!

Did you know that more than once in his life, Jesus spoke the same words the elder said to John? He came to a widow weeping over a lost son and to a father weeping over a lost daughter, and he said, “*Do not weep*” (**Luke 7:13 & 8:52**). How could he say that? He said that because, in both cases, he was going to bring back what had been lost. In a sense, that's exactly what Revelation 5 promises - shows us - in relation to all of our sorrows. In the end, we will see that in every little thing, God's good purposes will be fulfilled. We can believe that now and in every place where we feel like weeping, we can choose to worship even when we weep and that worship will give us strength.

That's the first thing. Here's the second...

2. As followers of the Lamb who conquered by suffering, we also have to be ready to conquer by our willingness to endure suffering like Jesus. Suffering can come in many forms in this world. We see that in the story of God and of Jesus. We *may* face persecution but we *will* face physical weariness, spiritual conflicts, strained and broken relationships, misunderstanding, heartache, loneliness, and loss of all kinds. Jesus told us, “*In this world, you will have trouble,*” He said, in **John 16:33**. He also said, “*But take heart! I have overcome the world.*” We worship Jesus authentically when we don't just sing about his excellencies but actually shape our lives according to his example. Follow the Lamb who is the Lion and worship him!

III. GOD'S PURPOSES WILL TRIUMPH BECAUSE OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE LAMB, THEREFORE HE IS WORTHY OF OUR HIGHEST WORSHIP.

What we have in **Revelation 5** is one of the greatest scenes of universal adoration for Christ and for God found anywhere in any form. Beginning in **verse 11**, the adoration and worship of the Lamb and of

God moves out in ever-widening circles. **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, 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!"*

Verses 13-14 say, *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.* Every creature, in every part of the universe to its deepest depths and its farthest corners, worship the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb.

To the degree that you see, believe what this is saying, you will worship also. That's the point. Christ is worthy of our worship. This Lion became like a Lamb for you. God, who is holy, beautiful, and glorious, humbled himself and became one of us and was slaughtered and shed his blood to pay for your sins and save your soul so you can not only be with him but reign with him in his eternal kingdom. Where can you find a love more amazing, fulfilling, and more real, more substantive, lasting, enriching, and transforming than this? You can't! There isn't any.

How do you get this love relationship with the king of kings, with God himself? **Revelation 22:17** *The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.* You receive this love by repenting, opening the door, coming to Jesus, and trusting him. You put your faith not in yourself but in him. What he has already done to impress you with his love by dying for you and rising again is will only be fully revealed when he brings you home, makes all things new, and shares his glory fully. Believe that and worship Him.

Conclusion

I read a sermon this week from the 1800s by Charles Spurgeon. He pointed out that back in **verse 8**, each one of the 24 elders had a harp and a golden bowl of incense. The twenty-four elders represent all the people of God, the incense their prayers and the harps their praises. Spurgeon says they are all fully equipped to worship the Lamb. He stresses the picture's image, I have to paraphrase, but he says *each one was holding a harp*. They don't have to pass one harp around. No one had to wait in silence until it was his turn. They all were equipped and ready to worship, and they had good reason to do so. Then he says, *I'm afraid these words do not describe all of God's people. My dear sister, where is your harp? My dear brother, where is your harp?* Do you get what he is asking? Where is your expression of worship for the one who is truly worthy?

When you worship him, you will discover you not only are giving him what he deserves, but in doing so, you are getting what you most deeply need. When you worship him. Not just in song on Sundays but in your heart every day, in the classroom, the workplace, at the kitchen sink, or in the commute, when you let the challenges you face serve as a call to worship him from the heart, you are enriched, you receive strength. The worship of Jesus gives hope and changes you into his likeness.

It is good during Holy Week to remember that we have a huge mission to fulfill and many challenges. We are called to live and love like Jesus, to love each other - to be committed to the church and to, serve the world and do good and share the gospel, to grow deeper in true spirituality, holiness, and intimacy with God. All of that can only be empowered by hearts that worship because they have received God's grace and see that he is worthy of all worship. When you worship Him, remember this also: the Bible tells us the Lamb of **Revelation 5**, who is worthy of all worship, already lives in us. **Ephesians 5** says be filled with the Spirit singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord. Let the worship begin now. I want to live my life this year and for the rest of my life, waking up every day and saying: *"I believe in the triumph of the Lamb ."* He is worthy of honor and praise and every other gift of worship in word and deed all the time.

Amen.

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

Almighty God, Open my eyes to truly see and worship Christ as the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the one and only redeemer whose sacrificial death secures the salvation and exaltation of the broken and lost. I turn from my proud and foolish illusions of spiritual independence or moral worthiness and trust fully in him alone as my risen saving redeemer. Forgive my sins, make me yours, indwell me by your Spirit, and give me an eternal hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord Jesus, Help me to live a life of deep faith in your ultimate triumph, sacrificial love, continued presence, enthroned lordship and overflowing goodness. Continually enable me to see, with eyes of faith, the reality of who you are flooding my life with lavish grace from eternity past to eternity future and all through this present life as well. "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! Amen