

"WORTHY IS THE LAMB"

The title for our series on Revelation is *Revelation: A Spiritual Vision for Strength and Blessing*. When most people think about the kind of spiritual vision that comes from the book of Revelation they think about the apocalyptic judgments for which it is famous. But those judgments are not the source of the strength and blessing that Revelation promises us. Those judgments are there and we're about to get into that part of Revelation but before we do we are given a vision of something very different. We are giving a vision of the Lamb who is worshipped.

There are many striking characters in Revelation. There are the four horsemen, the beast, the false prophet, the great prostitute, the dragon, the two witness, the 144,000, 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. The Lamb, which is a title for and a symbol of Jesus. 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**) 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. So it's important to understand how the truth about the Lamb gives us strength in life.

We will come back to **Revelation 5**, the scroll it speaks of and the larger message in the New Year but this morning just notice how in John's vision he begins to talk about the Lamb of God. First in **verses 8-9**, where the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb and sing 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.*"

If you don't understand anything else and you find the whole book of Revelation scary and overwhelming understand this one truth...

I. THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS IS BASED ON THE SACRIFICE OF THE LAMB.

The first readers of Revelation would have understood the background for this. It's all through the Bible that

A. Our salvation requires a sacrifice.

Many scholars believe the need for a sacrifice goes all the way back to the story of Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve sinned against God's commandment instead of being liberated and god-like they became guilty, ashamed and separated from God. They expected and deserved judgment but God showed mercy. He gave them a promise of a Savior, the seed of the woman who would come and ultimately destroy the devil and set everything right again. And then, the Bible says something amazing. It is full of symbolic meaning, in **Genesis 3:21**, *And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.* Having lost their innocence Adam and Eve felt naked and ashamed but *God* clothed them, covering their shame and guilt. It was an outward picture of the grace of God that covers our sins with forgiveness. God could have clothed them with grass skirts, but He clothed them with garments of skins. That meant an animal had to die. Many scholars believe this is the first place in the Bible where the idea of sacrifice is suggested. The death of that animal pictured for them the truth that a price had to be paid if they were to be covered.

We aren't given much detail at that point but

B. As the Bible's story unfolds the need for a sacrifice for sin becomes clearer and clearer.

Abraham, Isaac, Job, and Jacob all offered lambs as sacrifices to God. In the book of **Exodus 12** the Bible tells the story of the Passover. On the night before God's people were to be led out of their slavery in Egypt, one of the most significant events in the Bible, God told Moses to have each family take a lamb and sacrifice it. It had to be a perfect lamb without any imperfections or blemishes. 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 blood of the sacrifice because they believed God's promises of grace.

From this point on throughout the history of God's people in the wilderness and Promised Land in the tabernacle and temple perfect lambs were sacrificed and offered as burnt offerings to God. *Why?* Why all these sacrifices? The Bible tells us that it was for one reason. 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.” God was teaching people that our sins incur a debt that has to be paid.

Some modern people have a hard time understanding this. But there is no question the Bible teaches it and Jesus emphasized it. When someone gets out of prison we often say they have paid their debt to society. In some small way we recognize that crimes can't always just be forgiven. Suppose someone commits a terrible crime: a woman is raped a life is taken, a whole community is devastated. What if a judge says, *“Well, he's sorry for what he did, so let's just let it go at that and let him off”*? Everyone would be outraged. What kind of a judge is that to uphold the laws that hold society together and evil in check? The Bible says there are spiritual laws of life just as we have cultural laws. God's laws are rooted in his justice and part of the ultimate spiritual reality. They cannot be sidestepped. Our sins create a debt to justice that has to be paid. The debt we owe because of our sins is too big for any of us to pay down much less pay off. Our only hope is that there is a redeemer who will pay our debt for us. That's the hope that was pictured through all those lambs that were sacrificed.

C. What the sacrifices pictured the Prophets put into words.

One of the greatest prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament is **Isaiah 53**. Beginning in **verse 5** the Prophecy says; *But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—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. **Isaiah 53:10** says: *Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, (The guilt offering was a lamb) he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.* The sacrifices pictured in dramatic ceremonies what the prophets described in powerful word pictures.

Seven hundred years after the prophecy that Isaiah wrote, John the Baptist looked at Jesus and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

II. JESUS IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP BECAUSE HE IS THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN!

Verse 12 says: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain...

A. Jesus is worthy to receive worship because he is not just a good man but the promised Savior.

Edith Schaeffer was once invited to the home of a Jewish dentist to speak with him and his daughter about Jesus Christ. On the second time that she visited she was answering questions with the Bible open on her lap when a group of college-aged boys came in. It was the son of the Jewish dentist with his fraternity friends. They asked her a few questions themselves and then she said, “Let me ask you a question.” They said, “sure”. She said, “I’m going to read a passage from one of your Jewish prophets, Isaiah, who lived seven hundred years before Jesus was born, Remember now, this was written seven hundred years before the birth of Christ.” Then she read the words that I’ve just read from Isaiah 53. She read that passage then she asked, “Who is that referring to?” The dentist’s son said; “That’s easy, that’s a description of Jesus Christ”. She said there was a moment of electric silence and then she burst out; “ Do you realize what you just said? Don’t forget ... what I read was written seven hundred years before Christ was born.” She said the three boys sat down as if someone had hit them. And she then was able to tell them more about Jesus and the gospel.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirms that Isaiah wrote His prophesy of Christ hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. Maybe you have never ever struggled with faith and doubt. But if you do, when you do, one thing to remember is the story of the Lamb and the prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus.

Jesus is worthy to receive worship because he is not just a good man: He is the long promised lamb of God who saves us from our sins. This is an important part of the gospel. Almighty God humbled Himself and became like a harmless, powerless lamb. The awe inspiring God who is worshiped and adored and reverently crowned with praise in heaven allowed himself to be humiliated, and mockingly crowned with thorns

and lead to slaughter to pay for your sins. God the Son, who had lived in the Trinity, co-equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit from all eternity, came to live with and die for us. He was born miraculously to a virgin. He became a man without ceasing to be God. He lived a sinless life. And when he died on the cross, it was as a sacrifice for our sins.

How Do you measure the seriousness of sin? How do we measure the size of a fire? By the number of firefighters and fire engines sent to fight against it. How do we measure the seriousness of a medical condition? By the amount of risk the doctors take in prescribing dangerous antibiotics or surgical procedures. How do we measure the gravity of sin and the incomparable vastness of God's love for us? By looking at the magnitude of what God has done for us in Jesus, the Son of God, who came into our world to humble himself and be led like a lamb to offer a sacrifice that saves us.

B. Jesus is worthy to receive worship because he isn't just an example to follow, but a Savior who ransomed us for God.

Look at **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, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."* This is what leads up to **verse 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 (a myriad was originally ten thousand but it came to just mean a huge number too big to really count) 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!"

To be ransomed means to be set free through someone paying a price for you. The price **verse 9** talks about is the blood of Jesus. Sometimes when people come to church and hear us singing about the blood of Jesus - I wonder if it seems strange to them and if they understand it all. When the Bible talks about the blood of Jesus it is not saying the physical fluid, the platelets and plasma from the veins of Jesus, had miraculous properties that work magically to wash away our sins. The blood of Jesus is so important because it is the dramatic

Biblical symbol of whole violent sacrificial death of Jesus for us on the cross. Everything Jesus did for our salvation is compressed into this one vivid image, *the blood of Jesus*. **1 Peter 1:18-19** Peter says; *you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.* That why in **Revelation 7:14** the saved in heaven who sing and worship God are those who have “*washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb.*”

Conclusion

There are several important truths that are taught in this image of Jesus as the Lamb of God in Revelation.

1st. The image of Jesus as the Lamb is important because Revelation is going to show us the wrath of God poured out in judgment at the end of history. So it is crucial that we remember that the God who judges is also the God who loves and who first humbled himself and sacrificed himself to redeem a people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

2nd. The image of Jesus as the Lamb is important because it shows us what it means to follow the Jesus. In Revelation followers of Jesus are called followers of the lamb (14:4) and they are said to conquer Satan not by overpowering him in some physical sense but, **Revelation 12** says, *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.* To follow the lamb in this life may mean that we, like him, will often have to humble ourselves, and suffer unjustly. However it means that if we belong to him, we like him, in the end will be lifted up to rule and reign with him. The worship the lamb is given is not only for ransoming people but also for making of those ransomed people an exalted people, **Revelation 5:10** says, *and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”* So follow the lamb, not only because he ransomed you but because his way, the way of humility and love and sacrifice *is the way to victory and glory in the end.* At the end of Revelation the dragon is conquered by the Lamb and those who believe in and follow the Lamb. The meek will inherit the earth - believe and live that.

3rd. The image of Jesus as the Lamb is important because it shows you the way to be saved is to trust in Jesus as the lamb who was slain for you. The book of Revelation continually confronts

us with this. There are two paths for all of humanity and for every human being on earth. The only way to be right with God in the end is to trust in Jesus as Savior now.

4th. The image of Jesus as the Lamb is important because it shows us the only way for people who are spiritually awakened to find peace and strength psychologically, or spiritually. In **Revelation 12** Satan is called, not only the deceiver but *the accuser* who accuses us day and night before God.

John Bunyan, the author of the classic book *Pilgrim's Progress*, had a hard time believing that his sins were really forgiven. Nothing seemed to give him any peace. He confessed his sins endlessly but it didn't seem to help for long. Then one day while walking across a field, he said he seemed to hear a voice from God speaking in his soul saying the words "*Your righteousness is in heaven.*" He said at that time he saw, in his mind's eye, Jesus Christ at God's right hand in heaven. Bunyan's suddenly understood that his acceptance with God did not depend on his behavior, or even on his feelings about himself, but on Christ alone and His faith in Christ. Christ was his righteousness. The song in **Revelation 5** is not "*Worthy are the very good people and the very sincere or sorry people.*" No! It's worthy is the lamb who was slain and who ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

In all of the drama of Revelation this is our heart our hope, our bedrock: ***We are an imperfect people, who have been redeemed by a perfect sacrifice.*** That's why we sing: "*Behold him there the Lamb of God, My perfect spotless righteousness. The unchangeable I AM, King of glory and of grace.*" That's why we sing, "*Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne...*"

Amen