

Good Friday

Revelation 5:1-10: "The Lamb Slain"

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Behold, the Lamb!

In Nomine Iesu

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We hear the words of the fifth chapter of the "revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1) recorded by His apostle John. We will consider this reading in three different sections, beginning with the first four verses:

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. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. (ESV)

Here John describes his vision of heaven. He saw God the Father holding a scroll in His right hand. "Sealed with seven seals" tells us the scroll was perfectly sealed. It could only be opened by one who was worthy. But "no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth" was qualified – not the saints, not the mighty angels, not the four living creatures, not the elders.

This reminds us how far we fall short of the holiness of God. We might think we are pretty impressive compared with the people around us. Maybe we are more kind, we behave better, we are more generous, and so on. But God does not command us to be better than other people, or even that we try our best. He demands perfection. Unless we are perfect, we have no business pointing out how good we are, and we certainly can't get ourselves into heaven. If the perfect saints and angels were not worthy to open the Father's scroll, think how unworthy that makes us sinners! Clearly we need a Savior. We hear the next two verses:

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." 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. (ESV)

Now the Savior makes His entrance. He is described in three different ways which don't really seem to connect: as a Lion, a Root, and a Lamb. Each title is a reference to Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. He was a King from the line of Judah through David (Gen. 49:9-10; Isa. 11:1,10). And He was a Lamb sacrificed for the sins of all people (Isa. 53:4-7).

John saw Him manifested as a Lamb, "as though it had been slain." The "seven horns," "seven eyes," and "seven spirits" indicate that He is all-powerful and all-knowing. But how is it possible that One with such power could be slain? It must be that the Lamb let it happen, that He offered Himself for this purpose.

That is why we celebrate Good Friday today. This is the day that the Lamb of God was slain for the sins of the world. Jesus was that Lamb, and He willingly went to the cross for you. Isaiah described it so beautifully: *“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. 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”* (Isa. 53:6-7).

No one tricked Jesus into this. No one overpowered Him. No one forced Him to die. He went in obedience to His Father and out of love for you. *“For this reason the Father loves me,”* said Jesus, *“because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord”* (Joh. 10:17-18). Jesus offered Himself in your place and now He bears the marks of the nails and spear as the signs of His love for you. We hear the next four verses:

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

When Jesus took the scroll from the right hand of His Father in heaven, this showed the Father’s acceptance of His sacrifice. Jesus’ work to save sinners was complete. Through His suffering and death, the wages of your sin was paid in full. God’s righteous anger was satisfied. Then the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed down before the Lamb and sang *“a new song.”* They sang of the Lamb’s worthiness, His sacrifice, and the shedding of His precious blood. *“[B]y your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”*

Jesus shed His blood for everyone. He shows no partiality. You and I are not saved because we are any better than others. We are saved totally by the grace of God. Jesus’ death won our forgiveness, and that forgiveness is imparted to us again and again through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.

Jesus wants you to know that you are at peace with God because of His sacrifice. He wants you to find comfort in His wounds which were opened up for you. And He wants you to know that you are a royal priest before God. You may be despised and scorned by the world, but your prayers and thanksgiving are welcome at the throne of heaven. There Jesus stands on your behalf, His wounds perpetually reminding the Father of your redemption and salvation. *Thanks be to God! Amen.*

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