

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song:

**“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.
¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve
our God,
and they will reign on the earth.” (NIV84)**

Theme: Jesus: the Lamb

1. He is our victorious sacrifice.
2. He alone is worthy to be praised.

A lamb isn't the most majestic of animals. In fact, it is a weak defenseless animal. It needs around the clock supervision. Someone needs to show it where to find food and water. It has no natural way of defending itself. It's not big or powerful. It's not fast. It doesn't look all that impressive or intimidating. You don't see any sports teams who call themselves, “the Lambs.”

But that is exactly what Jesus is called. As we did during our midweek Lenten services, we continue looking at the names of Christ, with his name, “the Lamb.” He is our victorious sacrifice and he alone is worthy to be praised.

Our text for today takes place in the middle of a vision that God gave to the Apostle John. He saw God sitting on this throne in heaven. Around him were 24 elders—12 for the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 for the 12 Apostles. They symbolize that Old Testament and the New

Testament Church—thus they depict all of God's children. There were also four living creatures sitting around the throne. These seem to be four high ranking angels. Before the angels, elders, and God there was a scroll, sealed off. This scroll contained information about the future, which is sealed from everyone until God reveals it. Then one angel came forward and said, **Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?** But no one stepped forward. Because no one was worthy. Not any of the head angels, not one head of the tribes of Israel, not one Apostle. They didn't know the future so they couldn't open the scroll. And if they aren't worthy to read from the scroll, neither are we. For we are nothing but horrible miserable sinners. We don't deserve to stand before God's presence, let alone open his scroll. Oh, we like to think we know what will happen in the future, we tell ourselves that we have a hand in the things to come. But we're sinful human beings, who know absolutely nothing. We are worthy of nothing. John began to cry because no one was worthy. Then an Elder told him not to worry—for the Lion was victorious and worthy to read from the scroll.

But when he came he wasn't a majestic lion. Rather, he was a lowly lamb. **Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.** The Lamb was slain—murdered, killed. This was the case with many lambs in the Old Testament. Very often a lamb without blemish or defect was chosen for a sacrifice. Day after day a lamb was taken to the altar of God in order to pay for the sins of the people. At times, the whole animal would have been burned on the altar. Other times, the fat portions—the best parts were offered up to God. Through the sacrifice of these lambs, God forgave the sins of the people. For as we read in Hebrews 9, **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**

That is the picture that John the Baptist had in his mind when he said about Jesus, **Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.** There is a reason why we have a picture of a lamb on the cross in the front of our church, or why there is a picture of a Lamb on that banner over there. The Bible regularly uses the lamb as a picture of Christ's sacrificial death. Isaiah prophesied in chapter 53 about Christ's suffering and death, **He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he**

did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. Peter says in his first epistle, **It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.** Jesus is called a lamb because like a lamb he gave up his life as a sacrifice. As the lambs of the Old Testament shed their blood for the forgiveness of the people, Christ shed his blood for all people of all time.

Jesus knew full well that he was going to do this. On that Maundy Thursday night, he prayed that he might have the strength to offer himself up on the cross. And while he was praying Judas came to betray him. That set in motion the death of the Lamb. His blood was shed when a crown of thorns was pressed into his head. His blood was poured out as his flesh was ripped open when he was flogged. Pierced by three nails. On the cross he was slaughtered. This lamb was slain. He gave up his life as a sacrifice for us.

He was a sacrifice in our place. Therefore he is worthy to be praised.

The Lamb looked like he was slain. But now that Lamb is in heaven. Remember that earlier, the lamb was called a lion. About that lion, an Elder told John, **the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed.** The lamb may have been slain. But he triumphantly rose from the dead. He was raised victorious over sin, death, and the devil. And so he was worthy to read from the scroll. He is the only one who is worthy to read from the scroll. Therefore he alone is worthy to be praised.

That's exactly what those in heaven did. They all 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.** And later, **Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!** He is worthy because he suffered, died, and rose for us. He is worthy because he is God. For only God can pay for our sins. Only one who is God and

man can serve as our substitute. He is worthy because he Lamb who sacrificed himself on the cross, rose from the dead victorious.

That wasn't the only thing the Lamb did. On Maundy Thursday we can't talk about Jesus as a lamb without talking about the Passover Lamb. The first Passover took place while the Jews were slaves in Egypt. For the 10th plague every firstborn male in the land of Egypt was to be killed. But those houses that killed an unblemished lamb—one year old male, and spread its blood around the doorposts of their houses, the first born in that house was not killed. That night when the angel of death went through Egypt to kill the firstborns he passed over the houses with blood. And in this way God saved the Israelites from slavery.

Each year the Israelites were to celebrate this Passover meal to remember how God saved their ancestors from slavery. That is what Jesus was doing with his disciples in the upper room that Maundy Thursday night. The Passover Lamb, which Jesus and the disciples ate (and all the other Passover Lambs for that matter) points us to Christ. For there are many similarities between the two. For starters the Passover Lamb had to be a firstborn male—Jesus is the only Son of God. It was to be without defect. Jesus was without defect because he had no sin. The Passover Lamb and Jesus were both killed on the same day. When the Israelites killed the Passover Lamb, they were not allowed to break any of its bones. The Romans were going to break his legs, until they realized he had already died and ended up stabbing him in the side instead. In fact when John records this event, he connected it back to the Passover Lamb. **These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.”** The Passover Lamb was one that saved the people of Israel. Through the blood of Christ we too have been saved. It's no wonder then, that Paul calls Christ the Passover Lamb, **Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.**

Jesus and his disciples didn't just eat the Passover Lamb, however. In keeping with the Passover provisions, they also ate bread made without yeast. And they drank grape wine. Jesus used that bread and wine to institute his Supper. The Lamb gives us his true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine. And so we receive the forgiveness of sins. For in the Lord's Supper the Passover Lamb

gives us his very body and blood—the very thing he used to pay for our sins.

And so we praise the Lamb. We join with all those in heaven in singing the praises of the one who became our vicarious sacrifice—our substitute sacrifice. We praise the one who gives us his body and blood for our forgiveness through his Holy Supper. For was slain. But was raised victorious. For he alone is worthy to read from the scroll. So he alone is worthy to be praised.

We long to join those in heaven in praising our God. But we aren't there yet. So we also serve him. We do the bidding of the Lamb. For he is our God and Savior.

A victorious Lamb is an interesting picture. A lamb doesn't win victories. A lamb gets slaughtered. Jesus, the Lamb, was slaughtered. But he also won the victory. For through his sacrificial death and resurrection he won the victory over sin, death, and the devil. And he gives us that victory. And so he is worthy to read from the scroll. And so he is worthy to be praised. So we join the angels and we join the elders in singing the praises of Christ. And we will do so forever. Amen.