

You'll see on the front of our table down here the words 'This do in remembrance of me'. Last month we were remembering the sacrifice of millions to preserve our freedoms. Today we're doing this – taking the Bread and the Wine – to remember the One who loved us and **gave** Himself for us. Jesus told us to do this in remembrance of Him. So all we're doing in our meeting this morning is remembering Him, the One who died on the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

I make no apology for this, although preaching this may make some angry. Why? John Stott wrote this:

'The cross tells us some very unpalatable truths about ourselves, namely that we are sinners. ... Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to say to us, 'I'm here because of **you**. It's **your** sin I'm bearing, **your** curse I'm suffering, **your** debt I'm paying, **your** death I'm dying.' Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. ... It's there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size.' [BST Galatians]

We have to see ourselves as **God** sees us and as we **really** are, and we only see this by looking at the cross and what Jesus was doing there.

I'd like us to read from the book of Revelation, chapter 5.

We read in the prologue at the beginning of the book, that this is '*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him*' and '*Blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.*' John received this revelation from God near the end of his life and recorded it for the benefit of believers down through history until the things recorded in it actually happen. So that includes **us**, you and me. It contains warning of judgement for non-believers, but **hope** for believers, those who hear the message and take it to heart.

There's no doubt, Revelation is a difficult book to understand. Full of imagery and symbolism, it's caused so much debate and discussion through the centuries, there's so much depth of meaning here. Of course I could never fit all a chapter has to say in half an hour, but as we're taking communion later, we're focusing on the Lamb of God.

In the chapter before, chapter 4, John has been given a vision of almighty God on the throne of heaven, receiving praise and glory from angels and the followers of Jesus, because he is the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

And as we move into chapter 5 here, we look **closer** and see that God is holding a scroll, with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.

The people of John's day would have known about scrolls, the books of that time, usually made of papyrus and could be up to thirty feet long, rolled up and sealed with wax or clay.

Here we have God holding a sealed scroll. Seven is often used as the number signifying **completeness, perfection**; so here the seven seals show the importance of what's contained in the scroll. One commentator [George Caird] wrote that the scroll contains "God's redemptive plan, foreshadowed in the Old Testament, by which he means to assert his sovereignty over a sinful world and so achieve the purpose of his creation." This scroll represents God's plan of **salvation**, it contains the full account of what God has in store for the world, God's wonderful eternal plan. It contains God's purposes through history into eternity.

But it's **sealed**, and while it **remains** sealed, God's plan is unrevealed and not carried out. And **this** is the reason we find John weeping out loud in verse 4, because it seems that there is **no-one** able to open the scroll, **no-one** who can reveal its contents and put God's plan into motion. John weeps.

But then in verse 5 John hears another voice, *'Do **not** weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. **He** is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'* There's One who **is** able to open the scroll and put God's plan of salvation into motion. Who is he? The Lion of Judah, the Root of David.

In the minds of the first readers or hearers of these words, these titles would have immediately conjured up an image, an image of a strong warrior, a mighty leader, with power and authority to lead his people into battle and on to victory. This leader was to come from the line of David, he was to be a descendant of King David, Israel's greatest king. The Lion of Judah, the Root of David. Well-known titles from the Old Testament for the **Messiah**, the One who was to come to bring **freedom** and **salvation** to the people of Israel.

The Lion of Judah **is** able to open the scroll. So there's great expectation in John's mind and the reader's mind too, when he hears this voice. So he looks, but what he sees isn't what he's **expecting** to see. John doesn't see a Lion, but instead he sees a **Lamb**. *'Then I saw a Lamb'* verse 6.

This is the first mention of the Lamb in the book of Revelation, but John uses it a lot to refer to the Saviour, 29 times in fact, whereas he uses

the name Jesus Christ 7 times, and Christ 4 times. So we see that the Lamb is central to this whole book, only **he** is able to open the scroll and so we see that only through the Lamb can God's work of salvation be accomplished, **only the Lamb** can set in motion events leading to the climax of God's victory over his enemies, and to the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. **Only the Lamb.**

What does the Lamb look like? Not a strong-looking lion, but a weak-looking lamb; more than that, the Greek word used here for lamb – arnion – actually means 'little lamb'; more than that, verse 6 tells us that the little lamb was '*looking as if it had been slain.*' Imagine the surprise, maybe even **shock**, as John looked and saw the lamb, at first sight weak, pathetic, pitiful.

But then he looks closer. Although the Lamb bears the marks of being slain, although he's gone though death, he's **standing**. The Lamb who was slain is very much alive, he's risen, he's victorious. And the Lamb is '*standing in the **centre** of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.*' The Lamb is central to the whole vision that John is given here. At the centre; he's the focus of all the attention and worship, which signifies that the Lamb is the **key** to God's work of salvation. He put it into motion, he will complete this work.

There is no other like the Lamb: he has seven horns and seven eyes. As I said earlier, the number seven signifies perfection, completeness; horns signify strength, and eyes signify knowledge; so the Lamb has strength, power and authority like no other; the Lamb has perfect knowledge. There is **none** like the Lamb.

The Lamb who once was slain stands in the centre of the throne, he **alone** is able to open the scroll and reveal that God will complete his plan of salvation through **him**, the Lamb. God didn't gain his great victory through a strong and mighty Lion, but it was achieved by the Lamb that was slain.

But **who is this Lamb?**

In the Old Testament we find the importance of the lamb in sacrificial offering, the lamb would be sacrificed to signify that a price had to be paid for sins to be forgiven, blood had to be shed. This is the image presented **here**, that the Lamb was sacrificed, the Lamb was slain, his blood was shed, so that forgiveness for sins could be achieved. We read in the letter to the Hebrews, '*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*' Hebrews 9:22. The sacrificial Lamb bringing forgiveness of sin.

John the Baptist says as he sees Jesus approaching him for the first time,

'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.' John 1:29.

In the book of Acts Philip is speaking to an Ethiopian who wants to have the Scriptures explained to him, and he's reading from Isaiah in the Old Testament where it says, *'He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.'* Isaiah 53:7. Philip goes on to explain this by telling him the good news about Jesus.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians writes, *'Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.'* 1 Corinthians 6:7.

In Peter's first letter he writes, *'For you know 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 defect.'* 1 Peter 1:18,19.

So the Bible makes it absolutely clear who the Lamb of Revelation is – it's Jesus, the Lamb of God, the sacrificial lamb, the lamb without defect, the One who loved us and gave his life for us. **He alone** could be that sacrifice bringing us freedom from the guilt of our sins. **Only he** was able to defeat death. **Only he** could rise again. **Only he** could put God's plan of salvation into effect. **Only the Lamb** was able to open the scroll. Only Jesus **could**. Only Jesus **did**. The Lamb was slain for us.

In verse 9 a new song begins, *'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open the 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.'*

We come to **what the Lamb has done** to make him able to open the scroll, to put God's plan of salvation into motion.

The Lamb took the initiative, he was slain, these verses say, he purchased men for God, he made them to be a kingdom. He took the action that was required to bring man back to God, no other **could**, no other **did**.

He was slain. *'... being in very nature God, [he] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself **nothing**, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!'*
Philippians 2:6-8.

God humbled himself, and was slain on a cross. The death he died, he died once, for all. It had – and **has** – repercussions throughout the history of the world. 4

The sacrifice of the Lamb on the cross set in motion the events which will culminate in the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. How?

'... with your blood you purchased men.' verse 9. Right down through the Bible we see that God plans to have a people of his own, from Adam, through Abraham, and Moses bringing his people out of Egypt, to God's instructions on Sinai, through God's messages through prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, God has declared that he will have a people who are **his**. God **purchased** his people through the blood of the Lamb. His death on the cross, shedding his blood, set men free from sin, but also bought them for God. Only the Lamb **could**, only the Lamb **did**.

But we're told here that he bought for himself a people which was from all peoples and countries, international, universal. With his blood he purchased men from all over, this event has universal impact, the Lamb will reign over **all**. The Lamb's death and resurrection have created a people for God. Peter writes to believers in his first letter, *'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were **not** a people, but now you are the people of **God**; once you had not received mercy, but now you **have** received mercy.'* 1 Peter 2:9, 10.

God bought you and me through the blood of the Lamb. He has won a glorious victory which means that there is no judgement of sin to be faced by those who are believers in the Lamb; and this results in the **certainty** that death is defeated, Satan is defeated, victory is assured. Only the Lamb could do this, only the Lamb has done this.

So we take our lead from the angels, and the elders, and the song spreads to all creation: "Worthy is the Lamb".

Let's sing "Worthy is the Lamb, seated on the throne, the Lamb who was slain."

We've thought about the Lamb who John sees in this revelation given to him by God; we've looked at his appearance, we've thought about who he is, and we've seen why **he** is the only one who is worthy to open the scroll and put into effect God's plan of salvation.

As we come in a few moments to take the bread and wine, the symbols of Jesus, the Lamb of God's broken body and shed blood for the forgiveness of sins, I want us to compare the contents of the song in verse 12 with the image we have of the cross.

By verse 12 we see that the song of praise has spread from the representatives to thousands and thousands of angel voices, and then in verse 13 we see that every creature in heaven and earth is now singing this song:

'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!'

This is **all** creation's response to the Lamb – worship. The ever-widening circle of worshippers surrounding the Lamb on the throne shows the **centrality** of what he's achieved, the centrality of what Jesus achieved on the cross. He was slain, by his blood he purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. The victory that Jesus won on the cross was **universal**, for people from every nation.

Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, that Jesus became obedient to death on a cross, and *'Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'* Philippians 2:9-11. What Jesus achieved on that cross is universal, for each one of us. He died that whoever believes in him should not die but live for ever.

So all creation bows down before the Lamb, they sing in a loud voice, and they worship him.

But look at the cross. The sacrifice of the Son of God. Jesus, dying on that cruel cross. The Lamb was slain. His blood was shed.

Then listen to the song here in verses 12 and 13. It tells that the Lamb is worthy to receive these 7 things – power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, praise. We've just sung these words ourselves. What a **contrast** with the image of the dying Saviour. To our human eyes we see the exact **opposite**. Let's just think about them one by one.

Power. Although Jesus was dying there, seemingly powerless against his enemies, he was in fact winning the crucial victory: Colossians 2:15 tells us, *'And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.'*

Wealth. On the cross, Jesus was stripped of everything, absolutely everything. The ultimate image of poverty. *'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for **your** sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.'* 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Wisdom. It would hardly have been considered a **wise** thing to be put in the position of crucifixion, the cruellest of executions. Not a wise thing. Paul writes, *'we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles'* the human eye does not see Jesus dying on a cross as wise, but foolish; but Paul goes on to say, *'but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom.'* 1 Corinth. 1:23-25. The Lamb was slain, the wisdom of God.

Strength. That helpless figure hanging there, weak, *'he was crucified in weakness'* 2 Corinthians 13:4, but in 1 Corinthians 1 again we read, *'... the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.'* This was in fact God's strength at work.

Honour. The cross was the ultimate symbol of shame and humiliation. All who saw him hanging there mocked him. But as we reminded ourselves earlier, there is a day coming when every knee will bow before him, the King of kings and Lord of lords. They will give him honour.

Glory. Matthew tells us that as Jesus suffered on the cross, the sun stopped shining and darkness came over all the land. It was a very dark place. But before he went to the cross, Jesus saw the coming event differently, he says in John 12:23, *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'* Glory, not darkness.

And praise. Deuteronomy 21:23 tells us that *'anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.'* Death on a cross was a sign of being under God's curse. But Jesus bore our sins on the cross, he bore our curse. Through his death he took away our curse, our judgement. And so he is worthy to receive the praise of all creation.

What the world called a curse, God turned into the means of these - *power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise.* The focal point of it all – the Lamb who was slain – is worthy to be praised for ever and ever.

'Then I saw a Lamb.' Here is the image showing the means and result of God's plan of salvation. The Lamb who was slain, still bearing the marks of his sacrifice. He was slain to defeat all the enemies of God and mankind. But he **is** seated on the throne, he is reigning victorious. The Lamb has reclaimed the world for God once and for all.

All creation sings of and to the Lamb. Before we come around this table of remembrance and celebration, let's sing
'I will sing of the Lamb, of the price that he paid for **me**.'