

The Lamb of God

“I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain.”

—*Revelation 5:6*

ONE OF THE MOST INTER-esting and meaningful symbolisms of the Bible is that of the slain lamb. By it God calls attention to the great work of atonement centered in Christ Jesus, an atonement that is based upon the shedding of blood. The state-

ment of our text relative to the slain lamb is one of a number of such references by which, through type and prophecy, the divine program of redemption through Christ may be traced. This thread of thought pertaining to the importance of the blood in the redemptive program is first picked up early in the Book of Genesis.

Soon after the disobedience of our first parents and the pronouncement upon them of the sentence, “Dying, thou shalt die,” God calls our attention in a pictorial way to the fact that an atonement for sin ultimately would be made. He made a statement to the effect that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head. This was a vague way of saying that in some manner the result of the tragedy that had just occurred in Eden would be set aside,

and that the sentence of death thus being imposed upon our first parents would be removed. It was fitting, therefore, that God should begin to indicate the manner in which this was to be accomplished.

He did this in a very unique way, by manifesting his special favor upon an offering that was brought to him by Abel of the “firstlings of his flock”—an offering which called for the shedding of blood. (Gen. 4:4) In Hebrews 11:4, the apostle tells us that “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous.”

The Bible does not indicate the extent of Abel’s knowledge concerning the significance of the sacrifice which he brought to the Lord, but the apostle’s statement does indicate that he must have had sufficient knowledge to know that the bringing of this firstling of the flock would be especially pleasing to the Creator. Evidently the reason God was so pleased is because the sacrifice of the lamb offered by Abel pointed forward to the coming and sacrifice of the real Lamb of God which, in due time, was to take away the sin of the world. By this means, God thus indicated that the sentence of death imposed upon our first parents would, through Christ, be set aside.

ISAAC A TYPE

Sometime after the flood, God appeared to Abraham and made him the promise that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. When Isaac was born, Abraham probably thought that he was to constitute the seed of promise. In fact, Isaac was a type of the coming seed—Christ.

God asked Abraham to offer up his beloved son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. Abraham's faith rose to the occasion. He actually made every necessary preparation to carry out the divine will, even to the raising of his knife to slay his son. Then the angel of the Lord intervened, and a lamb was substituted for Isaac.—Gen. 22:13

By this means, God indicated that before all the families of the earth could be blessed through the seed promised to Abraham, a loving father would need to give up in sacrifice his beloved son. The father who does this in the divine plan is the Heavenly Father himself. He sent his own son, permitting him to be offered up in sacrifice. Through that sacrifice, all who die in Adam will be given the opportunity of gaining life through Christ. The lamb that was substituted for Isaac became thereafter a type of the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

THE PASSOVER LAMB

Later, the time came for God to bring about the deliverance of his people from the land of Egypt. This pictured, in a general way, the eventual deliverance of all mankind from the bondage of sin and death. When God delivered his typical people, we find that a lamb—the Passover lamb—figured very prominently in the deliverance. The Apostle Paul tells us that the sacrifice of the Passover lamb represents the sacrifice of Christ. He says, “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast.” (I Cor. 5:7,8) This sacrifice makes possible the deliverance of the antitypical firstborns now, and the deliverance of the whole world by and by.

In Hebrews 12:23, the apostle also speaks of the “church of the firstborn.” Those in Israel immediately affected by the blood of the Passover lamb were the firstborns. Thus the Scriptures show that through the faithful followers of Christ of this age, typically foreshadowed by the firstborns of Israel, deliverance from death is to come to all mankind.

PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION

In the pictures and types of the Bible, the symbolism of the slain lamb is thus kept prominently before our minds. In the prophecies as well, God reminds us of the great sacrifice that would be made by his beloved son. One example of this is found in the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 53. The chapter describes the sufferings of the Lamb of God and, in the end, portrays the glory that follows his sufferings. In verse seven, we read, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

John the Baptist was the last of the prophets, and he enjoyed the blessed privilege of identifying Jesus as the one who had come to fulfill both the pictures and the prophecies of the Old Testament relative to the redemptive work of the slain lamb. John made his identification of God’s lamb by those well known words, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

Later the apostles referred back to the redemptive work of Christ and identified his sufferings with the prophecies of the Old Testament. In I Peter 1:19,

the apostle speaks of him as “a lamb without blemish and without spot.” In Acts 8:32-35, reference is also made to Jesus as a slain lamb, quoting directly from Isaiah 53. Thus it is that God has given us this abundant array of testimony, assuring us over and over again of his loving plan of redemption carried out through his Son. This is a plan whereby not only the “firstborn” class have a standing before him, but also one in which eventually all mankind will have the opportunity of returning to a condition of “at-one-ment” with their Creator. The poet has truly said:

“How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say, than to you He hath
said?

You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled.”

—*Hymns of Dawn*

PROMINENCE IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Our opening text in Revelation 5:6 is not the only reference to the symbolism of the slain lamb in the Book of Revelation. Many of the great events outlined in this closing prophecy of the Bible are shown to be either directly or indirectly associated with “the lamb that was slain.” The Lamb is the one who is found worthy to open the scroll of the divine plan, as symbolized in the progressive opening of the seven seals. Later, the Lamb is represented as being at war with the beast, and his victory over the beast is vividly foretold. In Revelation 19:7, the Lamb is pictured as being united in marriage with his bride—the “people for his name” mentioned in Acts 15:14.

Finally, when God would emphasize the fact that the ultimate objective in his loving program for the human family is the restoration of mankind to life and happiness, he reminds us that this glorious consummation is to be brought about through the redemptive work of the slain lamb. We quote: "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."—Rev. 22:1,2

THE LAMB ON MOUNT ZION

In Revelation 14:1, we have another very interesting reference to this Lamb of God, which reads, "I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion." It is said that one of the characteristics of sheep, in contrast to that of goats, is the fact that they are inclined to seek the valleys rather than the higher places for their grazing fields. It is said that goats, on the other hand, are inclined to seek the hillsides and the high rocks. If this be true, then it is certainly most remarkable that the "Lamb" is here shown to be standing on Mount Zion. To John, this must have been an odd place to see a lamb.

The reason that this lamb is shown in an exalted position is apparent when we examine the fact in connection with other features of the great plan of human redemption. The Lamb of God is shown on Mount Zion, not because he had exalted himself to this high position, but because, following the true

sheep-like disposition of seeking the low places, Jesus first of all had humbled himself. We read about this, for example, in Philippians 2:5-9, where Paul, in admonishing the followers of the Master to a course of humility, says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery [more properly rendered, "not by robbery," or "usurpation"] to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."

THE GLORY THAT FOLLOWS

This picture of God's Lamb exalted on Mount Zion is a reminder of the many prophecies and promises of both the Old and New Testaments in which we are told of the glory that follows the sufferings of Christ. In the chapter from which our text is taken, the revelator gives us a symbolic description of the glory that comes to the Lamb following his sacrifice. "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, . . . and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."—Rev. 5:13

This is a wonderful description of the glory that follows the sacrificial work of Jesus. In Isaiah 53, the glory as well as the sufferings of Christ is brought to our attention. After describing Jesus as

the Lamb that is led to the slaughter, the Heavenly Father says, through the prophet, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great"—with the Creator himself. (Isa. 53:12) Jesus acknowledged fulfillment of this "exceeding great and precious promise" when, in Revelation 3:21, he says, "Even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." From this it is clear that Jesus actually was given "a portion with the great."

One of the vital lessons to all the Lord's people in the slain lamb picture is the fact that they are invited to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, suffering with him, inspired with the hope of sharing in his glory. The share which these have, both in the sufferings and the glory of the Christ, is brought to our attention in Revelation 14:1, where we are told not only that the Lamb is seen on Mount Zion, but also that there are "with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads."

The Revelator identifies these who are with the Lamb on Mount Zion as those who have followed the Lamb "whithersoever he goeth." (vs. 4) This means that each one of them has accepted the Master's invitation to take up his cross and follow in his footsteps of self-denial, suffering, and death. It means that each one of them has been baptized into his death. It means that each one of them, like the Master, has renounced the world and its spirit and has accepted the divine will as the supreme rule of his life, and has been obedient to that will, even unto death.

It is worthy of note that those who are shown to be on Mount Zion with the Lamb, and who, therefore,

are privileged to reign with him in the future kingdom by which all the families of the earth are to be blessed, are not described as those who have followed earthly leadership, or who have been subservient to human heads. Rather, they are those who follow the Lamb. Following human leadership, or being members of man-made organizations, does not lead to Mount Zion. The only pathway that leads to exaltation in the kingdom with the Master is the pathway in which we find the Master's footsteps, and that pathway is the one the Master himself described as the "narrow" way. (Matt. 7:14) The way in which the Master walked was one that ended in death—he was led "as a lamb to the slaughter." Those who follow him completely must also go with him into sacrificial death. In discussing the sufferings of Christ, in which his footstep followers share, Paul says, "As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."—Rom. 8:36

MISCONCEPTION OF MANY

In the great privilege of following the Lamb, we have brought to our attention a fundamental doctrine of the divine plan which distinguishes the understanding of the true disciples of Jesus from a misconception held by many. Millions of earnest people, devotionally inclined by nature, have prostrated themselves before an imaginary god to whom they have attached the name of Jesus, but without having any true conception of the doctrines of Christ—except, possibly, his moral teachings, which, in many respects, are not unlike the ethics taught by good people of other religions.

Such good people, sincere and wholehearted, have worshiped a god whom they have called Christ, and have supposed that in some inexplicable way he has saved them from a wrath to come—a vengeance which they imagine will be poured out upon the majority of the human race in the form of eternal torture in a literal lake of fire, or some other form of conscious suffering.

When we see the beauties of the divine plan, however, we recognize that neither the work of Christ, nor the work of his faithful followers is that of saving people from the fires of hell. Not only is there not such a diabolic arrangement in God's plan, but furthermore, Christ is not presently saving, or trying to save, the world at all. This is the time in which the Lord is preparing his agencies through which salvation will come to the world in the next age—and the faithful followers of the Master are to constitute a part of that agency.

Through the divine plan we have learned that Christ is the Messiah of the Old Testament, and that the purpose of the Messiah is the work of restoring the condemned world to life in a perfect, earthly paradise during his coming thousand-year kingdom. We have learned also that the church, the body of Christ, is now being called out from the world, not merely to be saved, but in order that they may become coworkers with God in accomplishing the Messianic purpose of restitution for mankind.

It is this glorious fact that lifts true Christian worship out of the category of blind superstition and devotion to an abstract god, and makes of it a definite and glorious purpose in life. It is an actual vocation in which all of our time, talents, strength and means

are laid upon the altar of sacrifice beside that of Jesus, that we may be accepted as his body members. Thus we can be coworkers with the God of the universe in carrying out his plan for reconciling a lost race to himself.—Rom. 12:1; II Cor. 5:16-21; 6:1

FOLLOWING THE LAMB

The matter of following the Lamb involves much more than merely living a moral and upright life and acknowledging Christ as our Savior. The rich young ruler who came to Jesus to inquire the terms of discipleship was plainly told that his morality, which resulted in an earnest effort to keep God's law, still left him lacking so far as being his disciple was concerned. He was bidden to give up all that he had, and then to follow Jesus in sacrifice, even unto death.

The matter of following the Lamb is not a blind submission to trial, although it will result in trial. It is not a frenzied activity in serving the Lord, although one cannot truly follow the Lamb without constant enthusiastic activity in the divine service. To truly follow the Lamb means an intelligent obedience to the plan of God as outlined in the Bible, including the sharing of Christ's sufferings which lead to glory. It means being counted with him as sharing in the great offering that is made whereby the sin-cursed and dying world is to be restored to life and perfection.

While thus following in Jesus' footsteps, the faithful disciple is inspired by the hope of glory with Christ in his kingdom. Jesus prayed for the same glory to be bestowed upon his faithful followers as the Heavenly Father had promised to bestow upon him. (John 17:24) The apostle says that if we

suffer with him, we shall also reign with him. The apostle also explains that upon conditions of faithfulness we may hope to appear with him in glory, and that if we are in Christ and Christ is in us, we have a hope of glory.—II Tim. 2:12; Col. 3:4; 1:27

DIVIDING THE SPOIL WITH THE STRONG

In Isaiah 53, where the prophet foretells the high exaltation of the slain lamb, he also prophesies the glorification of his faithful body members with him, and thereby helps to identify those who are with the Lamb on Mount Zion. We read, “Therefore will I [God] divide him [Jesus] a portion with the great [the God of the universe], and he [the exalted Jesus] shall divide the spoil with the strong.” (vs. 12) Jesus affirms the fulfillment of this prophecy on his own behalf and reiterates the glorious promise to his followers in Revelation 3:21. We quote it now in full, a part having been quoted foregoing: “To him that overcometh [“the strong” of Isaiah 53:12] will I grant to sit with me in my throne [“divide the spoil with the strong”], even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

The strong ones of Isaiah 53:12 are not strong in their own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. They do not lean to their own understanding, but looking to the Lord for wisdom to direct their steps in the narrow way of sacrifice. They also depend upon him for strength, and they press forward by following in the footsteps of Jesus. They continue to do this all the way to death. Thus, they are overcomers and upon this condition they will be with him on Mount Zion.

May the picture of the slain lamb and the thoughts associated therewith continue to inspire us in our endeavors to walk in his steps. May it help us to understand better what constitutes a true follower of Christ and induce us all to be faithful as such. May the hope of being united with the Lamb as a member of his bride who will yet have the privilege of saying to the dying world, "take the water of life freely," furnish us with renewed confidence. May we have that sacrificial devotion and energy which will assure us of an abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." "And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."—Rev. 22:17; II Pet. 1:10,11; Rev. 20:4

