

In order to bring justice and righteousness to the earth, someone must be found worthy to execute God's plan for final judgment. Only Jesus Christ, because of his self-sacrifice, is worthy of such a task. Join the heavenly and earthly chorus of praise to the one whose sacrifice establishes God's priestly kingdom.

Introduction: Story of the "Sword in the Stone." Sacrifice is the remedy for our unworthiness and guilt.

I. Starting at the End of Sacrifice

A. The Lion-Lamb alone is worthy to open God's seven-sealed scroll (vv. 1-5)

God is holding a scroll that is written on front and back, sealed seven times, containing his plan for the world and its destiny (Revelation 6; cf. Ezekiel 2:9-3:3; Daniel 12:1-13; Isaiah 29:11). If the scroll cannot be opened, then final justice will never come to earth. So John weeps loudly until he learns the exalted Lion of Judah and Root of David is worthy to open the scroll because he has conquered.

B. The Lion-Lamb is worthy because he alone was sacrificed (vv. 6-10)

Then John sees a formerly slaughtered Lamb approach the throne and take the scroll. Music, prayer, and praise arise in heaven, declaring the Lamb worthy to open the scroll and execute God's plan to bring justice and righteousness to earth. The Lamb is declared worthy because he was sacrificed.

C. The Lion-Lamb is worthy to receive all praise and worship (vv. 11-14)

Once the Lamb takes the scroll, the innumerable angels erupt in a heaven-shaking chorus of song to the Lamb. Then the rest of creation joins the heavenly chorus. Disaster averted.

II. What is the Story of Sacrifice?

A. Act One: Creation

In the beginning when God made the heavens and the earth, every creature was worthy to approach their Creator in worship and praise. And God's people, Adam and Eve, offered to him a sacrifice of praise. God tested their worship and praise by commanding them not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

B. Act Two: Fall

But Adam and Eve did not remain at one with God. They became unworthy and incurred cosmic guilt when they counted the Serpent more worthy than their Creator. In their guilt they covered themselves with fig leaves. But God mercifully provided them animal skins as covering (Genesis 3:21). From then on all praise and worship had to be purified through a blood sacrifice to please God.

C. Act Three: Israel

1. Substitution. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac his only son. But just in time God provided a lamb as a substitute for Isaac.
2. Protection. When the Lord rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, he commanded the Passover lamb be a substitute sacrifice for the firstborn of Israel. When God's Destroyer brought the plague of firstborn death to Egypt, the Lord, when he saw the sign of the lamb's blood around a door, protected and delivered that household. He covered and shielded his people like a bird hovers over her nest protecting her young (cf. Isaiah 31:5).

3. Satisfaction. God gave detailed instructions to the priests for sacrificial offerings (Leviticus 1-7). But sacrifices must be continually offered because they did not sufficiently provide atonement, purification, or sanctification (Hebrews 10:1-4). When Israel failed to show faith in God to make an end to the continual need for sacrifice, God sent them away from his presence. When Israel returned from exile, the sacrifices resumed, but they were still unworthy.
4. Perfection. The prophets envisioned a final perfect sacrifice - the Lamb of God who would die as an effective substitute to punish sin, satisfy God's righteous wrath against sin, and make permanent atonement for his people (Isaiah 53). The OT ends with hope that someday God will provide the perfect sacrificial lamb for our guilt and unworthiness.

D. Act Four: Jesus and the Church

Jesus described his mission in terms of ransom and sacrifice (Mark 10:45). God accepted his Son's death as the perfect sacrifice, and then glorified his Son by raising him from death. Now God's people are considered worthy on account of Christ's substitute sacrifice, with their guilt expunged and sin forgiven. The Church's commission is to proclaim this gospel and live a sacrificial life of praise. Jesus commanded every Christian to sacrifice by taking up his cross and following him (Matthew 10:38).

E. Act Five: New Creation

When Christ returns, those whom he ransomed by his sacrifice will rule and reign with him forever. God's people will then fully experience what it means to be a priestly kingdom that is accepted, pure, holy, and worthy. And together they will fall down and worship God and the Lamb forever.

III. Why the Story of Sacrifice?

A. To magnify our condition of unworthiness (vv. 1-4)

Everyone has to deal with his or her guilt. The question is: what do you do with it? Only if you see yourself as unable to fix your guilt will you be in a position to give it to Jesus. Because Jesus wants you to acknowledge you can't deal with it and that only he can.

B. To glorify Jesus Christ, crucified and risen (vv. 5-10)

The Lamb literally sacrificed himself for his people. He is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7b). His sacrifice was the perfect substitute, protection, and satisfaction. But Jesus is not just the Lamb of God; he is also the Lion of Judah. Jesus is alive. He can actually receive all power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing. He is both the Lion and the Lamb, crucified once and raised forever!

C. To purify and sanctify our sacrifice of praise (vv. 11-14)

How do you know his sacrifice is for you? Just look at your response. A Christian is a person who truly sees his own profound unworthiness, but is not crippled by his guilt. Why? Because a Christian looks by faith away from himself to the Lion-Lamb who is crucified and risen. And the beauty of that sacrifice changes his heart. A Christian longs to live a life of sacrifice to God and neighbor (Romans 12:1-2). A Christian is a person who is more and more purified and sanctified by God, a person who desires to praise and worship the Holy One, the Worthy One, Jesus Christ, the Lion-Lamb of God.

Conclusion: Do you hear the gospel in the Story of Sacrifice? Tim Keller says it this way: "We are more sinful and flawed [and I might add unworthy and guilty] than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." Do you dare believe it?