

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

What is the greatest celebration you have ever witnessed? Maybe you were watching TV last month when the new pope was chosen and heard the deafening cheers as the white smoke filled the sky over the Vatican. Or, maybe it was a couple of years ago when you were able to watch an encore presentation of The Royal Wedding, watching the newly-wed couple process through the streets of London, to the shouts and cries and songs of their adoring subjects. Or maybe, I wasn't alive at the time, but maybe it was the numerous parades and celebrations held throughout our country on VE-Day, after Nazi Germany finally surrendered in WWII.

I'm talking about an event that is just so spectacular that you know you're in a moment of greatness. Have you ever had that experience? Well, this morning, we get an insight into one of those moments, really, one that outshines them all. Today, our risen Lord reveals himself in his heavenly glory. Worthy is the Lamb!

Now, over the next couple of weeks, we're going to walk through one of the neatest books of the Bible, the book of Revelation. Now, I know you might use another word to describe Revelation, like difficult, complex, intricate. Maybe it's a book you try to avoid reading at all costs because it's just so confusing.

That can be true because Revelation is a vision, given by God to the apostle John, a vision rich with pictures and symbols and figurative language, all pointing to the End Times, which sometimes can be difficult to understand. But you know what's not difficult to understand? Everything in Revelation boils down to this one key theme, this amazing truth. **IN THE END, JESUS WINS!**

For John, when he wrote this book, that truth meant the world. You see, it was about 50/55 years after the risen Lord had left him and the rest of the disciples to carry out the mission of going out and making disciples of all nations. As you've probably seen in your own life, it's not so easy to do.

For him and the rest of the early Christians, it was even more difficult because they faced open and intense and violent persecution from Jesus' enemies. Even when John wrote Revelation, he was isolated on the island of Patmos, exiled there because he faithfully witnessed about Christ. Now that's persecution.

But do you think he cared? Do you think he was worried? Not in the least. His enemies may have bested him, physically, but here's what Jesus told John in his vision, "Do not be afraid...I was dead, and behold! I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." Basically...Jesus wins!

Well, in our verses this morning, John sees what takes place following Jesus' victory. He's standing inside the throne room of heaven, and there's quite the crowd there. There's thousands and thousands of angels, the Greek word used for that number is "myriad," meaning an indefinite number, too many to count, surrounding the throne. There are four living creatures, a group of select angelic beings, guarding the throne. And then there are 24 elders. Now, not to get into too much of the symbols here, but those elders represent the whole company of believers.

So, I guess you could say all the residents of heaven are there, gathered for a banquet unlike any other. And the guest of honor? The Lamb. And not just any lamb, but the Lamb who was slain. Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus, the King of heaven and earth, now reigning on his heavenly throne.

Listen to the jubilant song his loyal and loving subjects praise him with, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

What beautiful words to worship the majesty of the Lamb! He's worthy to receive almighty power, because his strength has overthrown our greatest enemy, the devil. He's worthy to receive wealth and riches, because he paid the ultimate price, his precious blood, to redeem us from our sins. He's worthy to receive wisdom because the seeming foolishness of his cross was all part of God's plan of divine wisdom to save us who had fallen into sin. He's worthy of honor, glory, and praise because of the shame and disgrace and ridicule that were heaped on him in his passion.

Now, can you imagine the intensity of this song as it's sung in the heavenly realms? The sheer number of voices uniting to glorify their king? I try to think of an earthly comparison, but it's just not possible. Even the greatest rendition of Handel's "Alleluia Chorus," which I think is based on this section of Scripture, but even the greatest rendition of that, with a a hundred-piece symphony and a thousand-voice choir singing at the top of their lungs, certain to give you the chills, would not compare to this heavenly song for the Lamb who was slain, Jesus, the King who wins and reigns.

Do you understand what this vision must have done to the fledgling Christian church, to all the believers in John's time? If there was anyone who knew what it was like to be in the trenches, fighting for their Lord, being pushed back by enemies of Christ, it was the early Christians. Always having to watch their backs because who knows what enemies of the cross were around, watching, waiting to pounce on and hurt or arrest those who boldly preached the gospel.

And yet, in these words, they could find comfort and encouragement that the war was already over. The Lamb, Jesus, sent to the world, sent to the slaughter, had come out on top, victorious. And for them, no matter what happened to them on earth, the worthy Lamb meant eternal victory in heaven for them as well!

Can we find the same comfort in this song the saints sing in heaven? Can you find comfort in it? More importantly, do you celebrate in it, in Jesus' eternal victory?

Ah, that's a good question. You know, it was just two weeks ago that you were sitting here, dressed in your best, bright-eyed, cheery, not just because it was a beautiful day out. We were celebrating Easter, the glorious resurrection of our Lord, Jesus, who lives, and we were so excited to do that. And two weeks later...is the excitement still there? Are you still rejoicing in the resurrection miracle? Or, has the glorious event lost its luster? Has the Easter joy rubbed off as you've gone back to grind of life?

We're in the middle of April, and the snow doesn't seem to want to stop falling. Well, of course, we yell, get angry at God. He gets the blame for this stupid weather. No rejoicing there, that even though we

face this unfavorable weather here, because of Jesus, there will be a time where we will have nothing but the Son shining on us all the time.

Or maybe it's your attitude that has changed a little bit these past couple of weeks. "I find myself being more irritable and having a short fuse, getting in stupid arguments with my loved ones, saying words I don't mean, all that instead of showing the kind of love God put on display by sending Jesus into the world to save me."

Or maybe, instead of the rejoicing, you've turned to lamenting. "I was so excited after Easter, just on fire to go out and to tell the resurrection news to others. I try so hard, and my message never seems to work. I put myself out there, want to show my faith, share my faith, and I feel like others are just putting me down, and I get discouraged...or I know something just like that's going to happen, so why even bother? I can keep the news to myself and then I just avoid the hurt and the pain of rejection."

By our attitudes, by our actions, by what we say, by our sins, it often isn't quite the song of victory sung to the Lamb who was slain by his subjects in heaven. It's more like the lament of defeat mourned by those who have no hope from the Easter victory. I'll confess, that's me sometimes, forgetting all about who I am and what my Savior has done for me. Is that you as well?

For those times, look back at the song of heaven, recorded here in Revelation 5, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

You know, the words of that song are great, but the occasion for the singing is even greater. Do you know what the occasion is? It's the celebration for the Lamb who is worthy. And what makes him worthy? "...the Lamb, who was slain..."

That short phrase, packed with awesome gospel. I hope all this talk about the Lamb not only makes you think of what John the Baptist cried out when he saw Jesus, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

I hope it also reminds you of the famous prophecy of Isaiah, "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...He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

That Lamb was Jesus, the precious, pure, spotless Lamb, without any sin. But that's what made him the perfect sacrifice for all our sins. It was his holy life which Jesus offered to his Father on the cross, giving it to you and me for free, while at the same time, taking all our sinful offerings and dying and suffering hell for them.

And if that's where it ended, with Jesus dead, we could do nothing but lament our loss. But it didn't. The Lamb wasn't just slain. He also rose. That's what this Easter season is all about. We rejoice that our Savior, the Lamb of God, is indeed alive. His death is our triumph! He is victorious. Our enemies are defeated. We are forgiven!

We know how the inhabitants of heaven celebrate the victory of the Lamb. John shows us right here. That victory is ours as well, so how do we celebrate? Well, the obvious way is with our voices and our praises and our songs. You know, that's what sets our Easter hymns apart from any other section of hymns in our hymnal. You're going to be hard-pressed to find one that isn't joyous in nature.

Maybe there's one that when it's played every Easter season, you get goosebumps. I have a few of those. For our victorious Lamb, why wouldn't we want to sing as loud as we can when we hear these songs? Of course we do. It's our way to gather around his throne and praise the Lamb who was slain for us!

And what about our lives? How can we celebrate our victory with our lives? Well, here, John sees all of creation falling down and worshiping the Lamb. Worshiping is giving Jesus the honor and glory he is worthy of because of his life, death, and resurrection. Yes, we can worship him here, but really, the way we live our lives every day, doing it in a God-pleasing way, that's worshiping God and giving him honor and praise.

And finally, we celebrate the victory of the Lamb with our words. Have you ever been to a restaurant, where someone has a birthday, and then the whole wait staff comes over to the table and, everyone off pitch, they sing a birthday song to person. It looks like it's embarrassing, but you also know after seeing it, that it's someone's birthday.

Can't we do that with the message of Easter? We may not always have the right words, the message may seem to be a little off key, but we have the privilege to go out of this place and announce to the world the Lamb, who was slain, is alive. Jesus is risen! Alleluia! And through that message our risen Lord is revealed. Our Savior is praised. And we rejoice.

We may have been witness to some amazing celebrations in our lives, but you know, they don't compare to the one waiting for us in heaven. I hope you're as excited as I am to get there and be a part of it. That'll be a celebration not for the ages, but for eternity. But until then, we lift our voices and our hymns of praise to the victorious Lamb, who was slain. He's worthy of it. And he's definitely worth it, too. Amen.