



The Lamb of God

A sermon by Rev. Henrik Florus Ringius



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The Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world

(Rev 13,8)

This is how our Saviour is named. To us it may seem to be a peculiar name. It is not peculiar that He is named "*The Lamb that was slain*", because the Son of God who had become man was killed on the cross for our sake. He suffered everything with patience. "As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so He opens not his mouth" (Acts 8,32).

But it may seem peculiar to us when it is said about our Saviour that He is slain *from the foundation of the world*. The world had been standing most of its time when the redemption was done. This we know, because in the Bible the time of the New Testament is

called "the last time". We do not speak about "the last time" before we have passed more than the first half. Thus it is clear that the world had passed more than half its age, when the Son of God suffered and died for our sins. And yet it is said that He is slain from the beginning of the world. This is because His death should be valid from the beginning of the world up to the end. The blessing of this death should be poured out over all times, both before and after the time when it happened.

Therefore it is not amazing, if it is preached time and again about this blessed happening. Nor is it amazing that we have a special time of the Church Year, Lent, when the story of the suffering of our Saviour is to be considered more fully. May this time be a blessing to us. Give us, o Lord, the grace of your Holy Spirit, for Jesus' sake.

TEXT: *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also, if anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.*

Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show by what death He was to die (John 12,20-33).

Our Saviour's death, blessed in all times and eternities

1. How it was possible for our Saviour's death to acquire such a rich blessing.

In short, it depended upon this fact that He was what He was, the Son of God who had become man. It also depended upon His complete and voluntary obedience. By this obedience He went through His suffering. Our sacred text deals with both these parts.

It reminds us of the voluntary obedience by which our Saviour went towards His death. We are told about a bitter foretaste of the suffering. This foretaste

came to Him just before His death. When He had spoken about His coming transfiguration and glorification, He suddenly exclaimed; "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?" The sorrow that afflicted our Saviour at this occasion was not as hard as the one at Gethsemane, but it was of the same kind. It was the foretaste of the last suffering that was to be felt by the Saviour, because as a weak human being He felt the need of help and called upon His Father in order to receive it. But He did not wish to keep Himself away from it, and therefore He added: "For this purpose I have come to this hour", i.e. in order that I may know this and be aware what is ahead of me, and thus be able to decide of my free will just to go ahead. At this occasion our Saviour was so moved in His heart that the people who were present could realize that He suffered.

In order that they might know that He was the Son of God and not be offended by His humiliation, He cried out: "Father, glorify thy name", i.e. show that you are my Father. Then a voice came from heaven, saying: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The people that were standing there and heard this, then said: It was a thunder. Others said that it was an

angel that had spoken to Him. Then Jesus answered and said: "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine." Thus Jesus at this occasion showed unmistakably, in words and deeds, who He was, namely the Son of God having become man.

But just because of this, His suffering, obedience, and whatever He undertook to do, could obtain an infinite value. Such a value was needed, if His suffering and obedience were to become an atonement for the sins of the whole world and to be enough to allow the righteousness of life to come upon all who believe. And since He was not obliged to submit to the Law, because He was the Son of God and the Master of the Law, His righteousness could be counted to the credit of the people, whose case He had taken upon Himself. In fact, it is this thing only, the divine nature and voluntary obedience of our Saviour, that has made it possible for Him to be the spring of an immeasurable blessing. He is the Son, the eternal Son of God. He has been able to suffer an eternal punishment within the short space of time and thereby accomplished an eternal redemption.

2. When we are reconciled to God through the death of our Saviour, this is a great blessing. In this way the curse that has come through our sins can be turned into a blessing and an eternal bliss.

Our Saviour was speaking about His glorification that would follow upon His death: "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified." Then He added: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

If our Saviour had not died for us, He Himself could still have been glorified. Since He was without sin He was completely righteous and perfect. But then only He Himself could have been eternally blessed, and not a single man could have been saved. We would all have been hit by the curse of the Law because of our sins and the righteousness of God. The Word of God and every conscience that has been roused from its sleep witness about this. The wages of sin is death, bodily, spiritual and eternal death.

The Son of God, having become man, has taken upon

Himself the wages of sin. In that way He has changed the curse into blessing, wrath into grace, death into life.

Because, if the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, then it brings forth much fruit. Yes, indeed, the death of our Saviour brought forth plentiful fruit. When He died, it was just as though all people had died on account of their sins, suffering the punishment of their sins. "We are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died" (2 Cor 5,14).

"Behold, the Lamb of God. who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1,29).

"He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2,2). And because of this atonement it follows that we are reconciled to God through the death of His Son, while we are still the enemies of God. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself and fulfilled the Law of God. But this is what reconciliation means: the justice of God has been satisfied, God is not hindered by anything to receive us as His children of grace and make us blessed for ever. Since all the sins of all people have been paid for by our Saviour, they

can all be forgiven. Since all righteousness has been fulfilled, all blessedness can become our share. That is the plentiful and blessed fruit brought by the death of our Saviour. Because of this fruit all blessed will praise in eternity the Lamb that has been slain. All sinners would be able to take part in this praising and lauding of the Lamb. It is so, because nobody was forgotten when the Son of God died for us.

Nobody is destined to get lost forever. Of course it is necessary to become converted. The Saviour says: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Nobody who gets converted has any reason for despair. The thought that unconditionally you must get lost is quite as much a lie as the thought that unconditionally you will be blessed even without conversion. God, our merciful heavenly Father, "has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5,9).

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal 3,13). A firm foundation has been laid for our salvation.

3. To the blessing of our Saviour's death also belongs the crushing of the supreme power of the spiritual enemies.

When speaking about His death that was to bear so much fruit, our Saviour added: "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out." "The ruler of this world" – doesn't it mean the Lord God, the Creator of the world? True, the Lord God is the Lord and Master of the world. Without His will or permission nothing happens. But in Scripture the evil spirit is often called the Prince of the world, because the Lord God has allowed him to obtain power over men. This is a punishment, because by sinning they have made themselves the servants of the devil. Because of this they must obey him and go farther and farther in sin. This will lead to their own destruction, until they have to follow the devil to that hell which is prepared for the devil and his angels. As long as a person is untouched by the Spirit of God, he will not realize this power, exercised by the devil. He can even think that there is no evil spirit, or he can imagine that he is serving God and that he will be saved, and in the meantime he is doing the worst deeds of the devil, e.g.

hypocrisy or hostile attacks upon the Kingdom of God.

It is only when being spiritually awakened that a person will start to see and feel that he is a prisoner under the devil and his power, under the world and the flesh. And when all that happens it could bring him to despair, if he hadn't got a Saviour who has crushed the head of the Serpent and broken his power.

This happened that very moment when the Serpent bruised the Saviour's heel with a killing sting. Then it seemed as if our Saviour had been defeated by the Prince of this world. But exactly at that moment the Prince of this world was cast out, as our Saviour says in our holy text. For by His atoning death our Saviour also acquired freedom for us from the power of the devil. When the debt of sins was paid, Satan lost his right to keep sinners in his possession. Our Saviour obtained the right to rule over us, if we wish to belong to Him. He has bought us with His blood. Against the will of man the Evil One cannot hinder his conversion and salvation. The Seed of the woman has crushed the head of the Serpent. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

Therefore, in the matter of salvation the called and resuscitated man should not let himself be scared away from its seriousness by the idea that he is a prisoner under Satan or by the accusation that he cannot become free. God is stronger than Satan, and now God, who has become atoned through the death of Jesus, wishes to make use of His power to set the slaves of sin free. Satan may yell out his threatening of despair in their hearts: "You belong to me, because you have already worshipped me." Man may answer: "Jesus has fought for me and defeated you, so there is nothing you can do."

4. To the blessing of the death of Jesus also belongs all grace that is needed in order to share the blessing of this death.

"When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself." This was said by our Saviour about His death. By His death He was first lifted up on the tree of the cross, and then unto the throne of glory in Heaven. Thereby He had become the spring of blessing for those He has redeemed. But in spite of this we would have remained under the curse, if He had not said: "I will draw all men to myself." By these words He is crowning His deeds. What He says is a promise that He who has died for us will also arrange for us to share the blessing that comes from His death, unless we hinder this by intentional reluctance. For if we do not do that, He will draw us to Himself, i.e. help us to come to Him by faith and stay with Him, until He will lift us up to Himself in Heaven. But, what a consolation, that the Saviour wants to draw all to Himself! Otherwise He would have loved us and died for us in vain. We would not have been able to believe in Him and stick to Him by our own reason or our own strength. But now this also belongs to the

blessing of His death: He will see to it that by a true faith we may have a share in Him and in the blessing of the grace that He has acquired. And this He will do, although man himself is powerless, yes, even reluctant. Thus there is no lacking in His redeeming and saving work: "It is finished", which means: It is fully done. God has atoned for us by His death. He has crushed the power of Satan by His death. He has acquired grace for our conversion and faith. He has accomplished everything that is needed for our salvation, be given to us, since He also gives us the grace of His Holy Spirit who draws our hearts to Him. "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?" (Rom 8,32).

Well, such is the contents of today's holy gospel about the death of Jesus. It shows that His death is an inexhaustible spring of blessing for all of us. But in this gospel, so full of consolation, there is something more. It shows us that we can miss the blessing of His death and instead get to carry the curse of sin. It shows that it will turn out that way, if we do not agree to get converted but instead, on account of the atonement by Jesus, excuse our prevailing sins and impenitence. O, my listener, when you comfort

yourself with those words which our Lord Jesus has spoken about His death in this text, then do not pass over the words in verse 25: "He who loves his life loses it." Here you can see clearly that it was not accomplished by the Saviour that you should keep your life, your life in sin. Instead you must hate it, if you wish to be saved. Your faith in Jesus, therefore, is a false and treacherous imagination, if you believe that you will become blessed for His sake, if you continue to love sin.

But why should you love and keep the life in sin, which is so bad and short, if by doing so you would incur the loss of eternal life and all real happiness? O, decide then to abandon the ways of sin and to hate them. Then you will obtain real life now and forever.

Of course you cannot atone for your sins and deserve your eternal happiness. But if you repent, you will enjoy the blessing of the death of your Saviour. Everything will be forgiven, and when you repent you may believe this. When you turn to your heavenly Father, confessing your sins, you are approaching the Father who is atoned in Christ. This is what you ought to believe. Then you will be given power to tear to pieces your bonds of sin and to believe. This is so

because your Saviour will give you strength to become free. The Prince of this world is defeated. Yes, you will get grace to know the Lord and believe in Him. This is so because He wants to draw you to Himself.

In this way the curse will be turned into a blessing. Indeed, if you remain faithfully to the Lord and ask for grace from Him to be able to follow Him and serve Him, then the blessing will increase more and more. You will obtain a still greater heavenly bliss, the more you remain faithfully with the Lord. If, because of this, you will be despised and reviled by the world and its Prince, well then, do not care about that, because you will be honoured by God. "If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him." Those are the words, spoken by our Saviour in our text.

And when in a blessed death you will receive the blessing, glory, richness and pleasure of eternal life, then you ought to give all honour to your Saviour because of those things. His death, that made it possible for you to obtain life, will be the subject of eternal praise. In this way we are taught about those who are saved. They say: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom

and might and honour and glory and blessing" from eternity to eternity. Amen.

Henrik Florus Ringius (1847-1925) was a pastor and rural dean in the Church of Sweden, serving in Solberga Parish in the Diocese of Gothenburg.

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