

I Saw a Lamb Die

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Fear and Futility

ONCE I SAW A LAMB DIE. Well, actually it wasn't a lamb; it was a sheep. The death took place in a city—the City of Istanbul in Turkey. It was in connection with a Muslim feast. They said it commemorated the offering of Ishmael by Abraham on Mount Moriah.

The sheep was dragged out from a backyard onto the sidewalk, resisting and bleating plaintively all the way. Did it have a sense of impending danger? Did it know what was going to happen to it? I do not know. I only know that its eyes projected fear and sadness. For those of us who did know what was going to happen, the sight was pitiable.

Some of the men wrestled the sheep to the ground, tied its front legs together, then the back legs. The poor animal struggled convulsively, bleating protest against its captivity.

The whole scene was incongruous—a helpless sheep lying on a city sidewalk with Chevrolet taxis whizzing by. Men and boys stood around, talking animatedly but seemingly unconcerned about the sacrificial animal at their feet. An innocent creature was about to die to commemorate an offering that never took place.

The butcher stepped forward with his gleaming knife. No one tried to stop him. This is the way it had to be. With one deft stroke, he severed the jugular vein. Blood flowed freely onto the sidewalk. The sheep quivered once or twice, then lay motionless.

As soon as the death struggle ended, the body was suspended from a tree and cut up. They told us that the meat would be distributed to the poor or to friends and neighbors. And that would be the end of it.

My friend had turned away before the animal was slain. He couldn't watch it. It was too tragic, too moving, too sad. I wondered at myself that I could watch it and not be more moved than I was.

And I wondered, "Why this waste?" The blood had no atoning value. No sins had been washed away. The offerers did not get a perfect conscience as far as their sins were concerned. The sheep's death was futile.

Compassion and eternal salvation

I SAW A LAMB DIE ONCE. Well, actually it wasn't a lamb; it was a man. And it wasn't a mere man; it was God the Son. The death took place outside the walls of a city—the City of Jerusalem in Israel. It was at the time of the Jewish Passover. It had been prepictured by the offering of Isaac by Abraham on Mount Moriah.

The Lamb was hustled out to the place of execution, a place called Calvary. It was where criminals were put to death. People going into the city to keep the Passover passed by. The Lamb offered no resistance; He went willingly. Led as a lamb to the slaughter, silent as a sheep being sheared, He did not open His mouth. He knew exactly what was going to happen.

He had known it from all eternity, and now the time had come. It was a sight filled with pathos. Those eyes of His registered love and compassion—no fear, no hatred, only love.

Arriving at Calvary, they nailed Him, hands and feet, to a cross of wood. There was no struggle, no complaint, no summoning of angels to rescue Him. It was for this moment He had come into the world.

The whole scene was incongruous! The Lamb of God dying for the race of rebel mankind. The creatures mocking their Creator. People pushing into the city to eat the Passover lamb while outside the City the true Passover Lamb was being murdered. The Just dying for the unjust that He might bring them to God. The Holy One dying for the unholy, the Sinless for the sinful.

And the whole scene was most poignant. He was so innocent, so pure, so holy, yet He was willingly suffering both the wrath of God and the cruelty of men. He had done nothing but good for His people, yet He was enduring shame and indignity beyond description. Although He was filled with pity for others, yet there were few pitying eyes for Him.

After six hours of intense agony, the Lamb voluntarily laid down His life. Then a soldier pierced His side, releasing a great fountain of blood and water.

As I gazed, I wondered at myself "that I could scan the mystery o'er and not be moved to love Him more." I thought of the lines:

Am I a stone, and not a man,
That I can stand, O Christ,
beneath Thy Cross,
And number, drop by drop,
Thy blood's slow loss
And yet not weep?
And then I prayed.

"O Lord, I pray Thee, turn and look once more, and smite this rock, my heart."

But His death was not in vain. His precious blood has power to take away the sins of the world. God is fully satisfied with His work on the Cross, and God proved that by raising Him from the dead. Now those who believe in Him can have a perfect conscience, knowing that the sin question has been settled once for all. Now the language of our heart is:

None other Lamb,
none other Name,
None other hope
in heaven or earth or sea,
None other hiding-place
from guilt and shame,
None beside Thee.