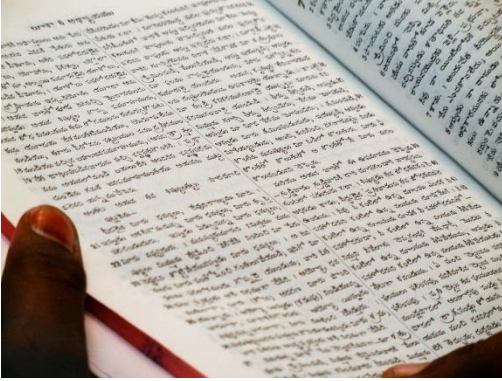


## Translating the Language of Easter

### Sermon for Easter Monday

Sermon Text: Revelation 5:1-5 (6-14)



*<sup>1</sup> Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, <sup>4</sup> and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>5</sup> And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." <sup>6</sup> And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. <sup>8</sup> And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> and they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." <sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" <sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Language is difficult. And bureaucratic language is even more difficult. And German bureaucratic language is the most difficult. Many of you were probably faced with this language when you arrived in Germany. Before you could say "hello" and "goodbye", you had to struggle with such words as Mietschuldenfreiheitsbescheinigung (rental debt exemption certificate), for example. But if you don't understand this bureaucratic language correctly, it can be catastrophic. The other day, a person received his answer from the Federal Office of Migration and Refugees. The first point stated that the refugee status is rejected. The first point was justified with about 10 pages of convoluted bureaucratic language. The second point then stated that the secondary refugee status is granted. Again with a few pages of bureaucratic language. So this person could attain the right of residency with the second point. But because she didn't understand it, she simply fell into a status of pending deportation because she didn't

understand the language. That is a very sad misunderstanding. It is a sad misunderstanding that can determine the fate of a person. Just because someone didn't understand the language.

It seems to me that it's important we understand the language about Easter and the language about the resurrection to new life! When we don't understand that we are like those who received a pass to heaven but know absolutely nothing about it and therefore they remain sad forever! In our Scripture reading for today, we get a glimpse of heaven. And there, the disciple of Jesus, "John," also had to translate a difficult text. In heaven, John finds the Book of Life. But this book is not only written in bureaucratic language. It is even completely closed and also sealed with seven seals. Now no one can approach. But John didn't just want to accept this fact. He neither threw the thick book into the corner nor did he nod and respectfully act as if he at best understood everything. Rather, he wept long and from the heart. Why did John weep at this point? What was even in this book that was of such importance? Why did it absolutely have to be opened? Later on we will be told all of this. It was all about the Book of Life. John had heard the Word of life personally from Jesus and passed it all on. But now, a few years later, the church suffered because of these words. An unrelenting persecution of Christians raged under emperor Domitian who just declared himself god. At that time, the soldiers went from house to house and liked to publicly question the Christians: "Say: Emperor Domitian is your god!" At their refusal, these Christians were given to animals to be eaten. This persecution became so bad that the church was close to becoming extinct. Many were already dead and others fled. For John, it was all about the Word of Life that he had heard from Jesus. And life was currently threatened in this time. He could no longer find a translation for life. And understood nothing anymore. And just as it happened for John, so it is with all of us. We know about life in Christ! We are baptized! We have a passport to heaven! But so often we don't understand because the world seems to contradict all the promises of God. Everything in our world seems to speak against life. And what is certain is that we all must die. How can we then believe in life. How can we communicate in our life the message about the resurrection of Jesus Christ? It's for this exact purpose John went into heaven. And there he saw heaven opened before his eyes. And there he saw the Book of Life! Where else should you get help than personally from God? Where else should you receive life if not from the Creator of Life? And in heaven, you should finally be able to receive clarity as to how life should continue here on earth. But unfortunately, the book remained closed. Because the Book of Life was not accessible. You couldn't translate it and you couldn't even open it.

What does this message with the seven seals want to say to us? Why is John allowed this glimpse into heaven only to find out again that life must remain closed with seven seals? It's almost like a person seeking asylum who receives admission but doesn't understand the text and is therefore deported. John's vision shows us two things.

1. The first is that the Book of Life is not a simple thing.
2. The second is that the Book of Life is very important to all of heaven.

All of heaven shows us that the Book is no simple thing. Because even in heaven great helplessness and sorrow breaks out. If heaven can't help, then who can? All of heaven and everyone who was currently there, ask: Who has the key to this book? The Bible doesn't pretend or play games. The question about the fate of the world and the question about our personal fate is no simple question. And it is presumptuous to claim that this question would be simple. Emperor Domitian would certainly have admitted something like that: "I have the key to life!" he would certainly have said. "Open your eyes! If

you call me god, you can live, but if you acknowledge your own God, you die!” With him perhaps a whole series of other false prophets. Yes, there are millions of false prophets who promise life and can’t give it. They swindle everyone and don’t speak the truth. No, the Book of Life remains closed and sealed. No one in heaven or hell has the ability to decipher this book. John sees all of this and weeps. He sees the Book of Life before him. It is so close yet so far. He knows that the fate of his loved ones must remain locked in this book. God’s right hand is on this book. The right hand of God also stands for his righteousness. This hand of God is over the book but it is frozen and paralyzed. God’s hand doesn’t go further. If God Himself won’t open the book, who will then? This same hand that led the whole people of Israel so mightily through the Red Sea is now powerless over the important fate of all humanity in the present and future. John is stunned. This hand that has already answered so many prayers and saved so many from distress, is now powerless and can’t decipher this book that can determine the fate of mankind. John sees his own life pass before him. He sees his sins and his weak faith. God’s hand is paralyzed and can’t touch anything either. John weeps about that and he also weeps that so many will come who will deceive people. It will be the false prophets and those who have empty promises. He sees all this and weeps bitterly.

2. But then John notices that the question after that is of greater importance. The program of life is declared as the highest priority in heaven. Everyone gathers and advises and wants to know how things will continue. And then a messenger from the highest authority came to John and whispered in his ear... “the Lion of Judah.” First very tentatively but then with cautious hope John wipes the tears from his eyes and looks up. The Lion of Judah. John knew this word since his childhood. The Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah. Then John wiped the tears from his eyes and but what he sees is no roaring lion but rather a lamb. The lamb was already slaughtered and lying down. This slaughtered lamb will open the book? And then John thinks of Isaiah 53. “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter...” it said there. And he thinks about the words of Jesus. He thinks about Jesus Himself who never opposed the Roman rulers with power but simply let Himself be crucified. His eyes slowly opened and he saw! He saw the price that God paid... FOR LIFE. FOR THE CHURCH’S LIFE. FOR JOHN’S LIFE. FOR YOUR LIFE AND MINE. THE LAMB! God Himself lays down as the slaughtered sacrifice. That’s how important our life is to Him! That He gave His own life for us! And all the representatives of heaven knelt and worshiped the Lamb. Because they recognized who it is and what He did. He opened the book of the seven seals!

And everyone knelt down, praised and worshiped.... everyone together. John, the angels, the many, many Christians who read these words afterwards, knelt down and worshiped. Because they all saw and recognized that God gave everything for our life. Today on the second day of Easter, we also can’t do anything other than just that. Praise and worship. We can do it because we know and understood the translation: He has my fate in His hand. His precious blood is shed. That is certainly the only power that could and also has helped. And John sees the prayers of the saints. So the prayers of the church come before God’s face. He sees that the prayers are very close to God. To be heard. His advice can’t be ignored. Your and my prayers are also very close and very important to the living God!

Perhaps we can’t understand much about the resurrection. After all, the resurrection is still ahead of us and we don’t know how that happens. But perhaps our understanding isn’t so important! Much more important is that God understands. In God’s language, everything is plain and clear. And He hears every word that we cry to Him. And yet God has left a word. And that is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. In Jesus, everything is clear. In Jesus, there are no closed books. In Jesus, God says His final yes and amen to you. That is certainly true!