

God's Lamb

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Bible Text: John 1:29

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Those choruses proclaim a great truth about our Lord Jesus Christ. We look to him and we worship him and we do so because he was slain for us, slain for sinners. And as we gather together this evening to celebrate the Lord's table together, we do so because Christ appointed this table, appointed communion, so that Christians would remember him and revere him.

Worthy is the Lamb. A lamb, of course, is a young sheep and in the Old Testament, it was the principle animal of sacrifice among the Jews of the Old Testament. The Jews knew from key episodes in their history the principle of a lamb being sacrificed to preserve the life of another from the judgment of God. For example, when God was about to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt after over 400 years of slavery, this principle came into play.

Turn in your Bibles to Exodus 12, if you would. Exodus 12. God instructed Israel through Moses just before he went through the nation of Egypt to slay their firstborn, God instructed Israel to slay a lamb and apply the blood to their doorposts. Look at Exodus 12:3, God speaking to Moses said, "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, 'On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household.'" Skip down to verse 5, "Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it." So the blood of the lamb marked out the Jews, marked out their household and separated them from the judgment that was about to come upon the Egyptians.

Look at verse 12 here in Exodus 12 as God had instructed them to eat a quick Passover meal, he says in verse 12, "I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments - I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." It's a very picturesque symbol of what was going to happen and the blood would spare them of the judgment of God and in like manner, as we remember our Lord's death on our behalf, we

understand that the blood applied to our soul is what spares us from the judgment of God to come against sinners in the future. Through the blood, judgment was spared upon the Jews because a lamb was slain in their place and his blood was applied to their account.

Going on in Exodus, you see that God required a lamb as the daily sacrifice for Jews to meet him. Look at Exodus 29, a less familiar passage of Scripture than what we just read. And we're touching on these things simply to prepare our hearts for communion, not to exhaust them in exposition. Exodus 29:38, "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two one year old lambs each day, continuously. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. Skip down to verse 41, "The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it the same grain offering and the same drink offering as in the morning, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD." In other words, it was a sacrifice that the Lord accepted. Verse 42, "It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory."

So the lamb was a symbol of innocence and it was slain in substitution for those who were guilty so that those who were otherwise guilty could approach God and meet with him there. The lamb was slain so that the guilty could approach God. In like manner, Christ was slain so that we could approach God despite our guilt, having his blood applied to our account.

Now the passage that I read at the beginning of our service, Isaiah 53, please turn there, if you would. Isaiah 53. Isaiah prophetically pictured Christ as a lamb slain for sinners. Isaiah 53:4, and you can see the sin bearing nature of Christ, that he bore our sins on our behalf, that he was interceding for us in our transgressions when he was slain on the cross. It was judgment of God stricken upon Christ in our place as our substitute, instead of us, on our behalf. Isaiah 53:4, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." Now notice in light of our theme for this evening, verse 7, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth." In the innocence and the gentleness of a lamb, Christ proceeded to Calvary knowing that the stroke of God awaited him there and yet he did not voice opposition to it. He did not shrink back from the task that God had assigned to him. He carried through that mission for which he came, that mission to save sinners like you and me, to be a lamb slain in our place, a lamb who would take the stroke on our behalf.

It was the appointed judgment of God upon his soul, verse 11. It was what God required for sinners to be reconciled to him and apart from the Lamb of God being slain for us, we would have no reconciliation with God. We would still be under his judgment. We would

still be facing eternal destruction in hell. Without Christ, beloved, we would be lost. Without Christ, that stroke of judgment would be falling upon our own backs and yet there in verse 11 we see that God was pleased, "As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities." God will declare a sinner righteous who puts his faith in Christ. God will declare him as righteous in his sight, washing away his sins. No longer holding sin against him and instead imputing the perfect righteousness of an innocent lamb to his account and then deals with us on that basis, deals with us as though Christ had committed all of our sins and we had lived the perfect righteousness of Christ in our lives. A perfect substitute. A perfect exchange. His righteousness for our sin and our sin for his righteousness because a lamb was willing to go to a cross and be stricken on our behalf.

Isaiah is saying that the Messiah would be slain like a lamb. Slain as a substitute sacrifice so that his people could avoid death in the judgment of God, and you see the biblical pattern of how this plays out and you see it again and again. In Exodus, there in the Passover, the blood is applied and the judgment of God passes over and they don't enter into that death sentence. The daily sacrifices offered at the tent of meeting. A lamb sacrificed morning and night, continually representing the blood shed in order to allow access to God. Isaiah prophetically pictures it. You remember even, we're not looking at this passage, but you remember how Abraham took his son Isaac at the command of God. God commanded him and said, "Go and slay your son Isaac," and what happened? Abraham said, "God will provide a lamb," as they marched up toward the altar. And as he raised his hand, having completed the act of sacrifice already in his heart, what did God do? He intervened. He provided a ram in a thicket behind Abraham and that ram was offered as a sacrifice instead of his son Isaac. The principle of substitution is so clear. It is so repeated and this picture of an innocent lamb, an unblemished lamb offered in the place of a man facing God's judgment is a picture given to us over and over again. Scripture, history and daily practice ingrained this on the mind of an Old Testament Jew.

Now, with those things in mind, turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 1, if you would. We have our hearts prepared to see with a fresh appreciation what John the Baptist said when he identified Christ to the people. You remember that John the Baptist came preaching, a crowd gathered around because he preached with such great power over time, and they were wondering who he was, if perhaps John himself was the Christ. Look at verse 25 of John 1, "They asked him, and said to him, 'Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?' John answered them saying, 'I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.' These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing."

So God, as it were, shined the spotlight on John the Baptist and attracted attention to John as the forerunner of the Messiah and John said, "It's not me but it's the one who comes after me that you are to look to." And in verse 29, with all that we've seen here in these brief moments together, in verse 29, "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said," what? "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The Lamb

of God who takes away the sin of the world. "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." John the Baptist points to Christ and says, "There is the Lamb of God. There is the ultimate Lamb. There is the fulfillment in human flesh of all the animal sacrifices that preceded him." Look at verse 34, he said, "'I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.' Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!'"

Now, scholars quibble over exactly what they think John had in mind when he made this statement. They question whether he was referring to the daily sacrifice of the Jews or perhaps the Passover or perhaps Isaiah 53, but do you know what? The overall import is very clear. John the Baptist was figuratively calling Christ a lamb because Christ would be slain and thereby become the meeting place that sinners would have with God. Christ, the lamb, would be sacrificed so the judgment of God would pass over anyone who receives Christ. That those whose hearts are filled with hatred could find cleansing in the blood of Christ. Those who feel the weight of condemnation upon their souls; who feel the weight of sin and the conviction of guilt upon them for having violated the law of God, could find in Christ, in him crucified, crucified and resurrected, could find in Christ the answer to their accusing conscience; could find in Christ peace for their souls; could find in Christ new life which could be found nowhere else; could find in Christ the one appointed sacrifice where they could meet with God and be accepted.

Something completely external to you and me. Not something that we've done through our own hands. Christianity is not a message about good things that you do in order for you to become right with God, rather it is a message of how God provided a lamb to be sacrificed for your sins and through faith in that crucified and risen lamb, you could find reconciliation with God and peace for your soul. Christ, the Lamb, would bear their sins in his coming death. It would be the innocent, blameless, unblemished Lamb of God; the unblemished life of Christ that would be offered in place of you and me. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul says, "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed." Christ in our place as our substitute.

That's what we remember as we come to the table here this evening and the Apostle Peter used this same imagery to impress the nature of salvation upon us. Look at 1 Peter 1:17, after the book of Hebrews. 1 Peter 1:17, actually after the book of James also. What is it that we are to have anchored in our mind? How are we to be mindful of this as we walk through life as Christians? 1 Peter 1:17 says, "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." It's interesting, isn't it, in light of Peter's words, when you go to temples of other religions. There was a Buddhist temple just a couple of blocks from where we lived in California for a number of years with all kinds of ornate gold gilding their idols and gilding their walls and all of that, supposedly indicating that it was a precious valuable place by the

materials that were used to decorate it. Peter says, "You weren't redeemed with that kind of junk, that kind of earthly material that has no value in the courts of heaven. You were redeemed by the blood of a Lamb. You were redeemed by the blood of Christ." And he says, "You remember that. You conduct yourself in fear. You worship the Lamb. You behold him. You give him reverence. You remember him for the sake of his blood, because the innocent Lamb laid down his life for you. The unblemished Lamb. It was his death on the cross that satisfied the death that God's law required as justice against your sins." Ezekiel says that the soul that sins will die and that there is a certain judgment that comes upon sinners and that's really bad news for all of us because we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Desperately lost. Desperately without hope. Desperately being helpless before the judgment seat of God expecting nothing but eternal retribution for the sins against our soul, and an innocent Lamb, the eternal Son of God stepped into our place, stepped between us in the defendant's chair and God as the Judge, stepped in between and said, "Father, I will take their judgment. Father, I will spill my own blood for their soul." And God the Father finds that acceptable in his sight. It is on the basis of the blood shed by the Lamb that we come together tonight. This is what we remember in communion. Our Lord Jesus Christ was God's Lamb, provided for the forgiveness of your sin. The Lamb of God, the Lamb that God appointed before the foundation of the world. Think about it this way: God in his grace and his mercy and his kindness prepared for you, sent for you, provided for you, a Lamb that you never could have brought to him on your own. God gave Christ as a Lamb for us for the forgiveness of your sins so that you could be reconciled to that God from whom you were separated.

Charles Spurgeon said this, he said, "God from all eternity appointed the Lord Jesus to be the great sacrifice for sin. When we rely upon Jesus Christ to save us, we trust in one whom God has appointed to save his people. If as a poor guilty sinner I leave my sin upon Christ, the Lamb of God, I leave it where God has bid me to cast it. I rest in a sacrifice which God himself ordained of old to be the sacrifice for sin. O soul, there can be no question that if you come to the Father in the way in which he himself appoints, you come acceptably. God's appointment is the guarantee of the acceptance of everyone that believes in Jesus."

What he's saying is that God has appointed one way for sinners to approach him. He has appointed Christ to be that one way and Christ was the Lamb slain as a substitute for sinners. He's the Lamb of God. He's the Lamb that God provided, that God appointed, that God sent. Salvation was always God's idea from the beginning, it wasn't yours. It wasn't because you loved God first that you find yourself now reconciled to God. No, Scripture says that he loved us first and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us.

So there are two aspects that this has upon your heart as you think about these things rightly. First of all, it brings great humility to your heart as you come to the Lord's table realizing that you did not deserve to have a lamb provided for you; that this was a sheer act of grace from God to provide a lamb for sinners. And yet because it's God's Lamb,

because it's God's salvation, because it's God's appointed way, we can know for certain that when we put our faith in Christ for our salvation, that we are most certainly accepted by God because we have come the way that he appointed. Not trying to earn our way in. Not trying to do the good deeds or the rituals that some church appoints and say that God must accept me on that basis. That's not what God has appointed. God didn't make you your own lamb. God did not leave it in your hands to make atonement for your own sins. You couldn't do that. Your blood was stained with guilt. It never could have purchased salvation before the throne of God. No, what God did was he provided a lamb, his own Son, to be the sacrifice in your place.

So it humbles us to realize, "I didn't contribute anything of merit to my salvation." It humbles us to realize the sheer magnitude of the grace of God when we were undeserving. And yet at the same time, it gives us confidence rightly understood. Confidence because as we come through Christ, we come through a perfect Lamb with perfect righteousness whose perfect blood makes a perfect plea before a perfect God on behalf of perfectly wretched sinners.

So as we follow the revelation of God and we have it lead us to Christ, we know that we have a perfect salvation, one in which we can have complete assurance that we belong to God through Christ because this is what God appointed. This is what God wants. This is what he requires. And when we come in the way that he has appointed, there can be no other result but that he would accept us in the Beloved. This table tonight reminds us that a lamb was slain in your place; that a real human body was torn by the whips; that real human hands were pierced with nails; that real human suffering took place on the cross of Calvary; that the eternal torments of souls were borne in his body. He felt the weight and the pains of eternal judgment on your behalf so that you would not have to. It reminds us that literal human blood was shed as his veins were burst and blood was poured out on your behalf. Not some kind of philosophy. Not some kind of rules that we follow that make us good before God. No, the real Son of God, in real human flesh, in real time, in a real place suffered for you. Suffered for me.

This table is a reminder of these things and as we gather together on Thanksgiving week here in America anyway, this table gives us the supreme reason for thanksgiving. Everything else is secondary. Everything else: prosperity, family, the love of fellow friends and all of that. Everything is secondary to the fact that a lamb was slain on our behalf and that is the supreme reason for our gratitude and the supreme reason for our thanks as we gather together here this evening. Christ has appointed this. In fact, he has commanded it. I'm so pleased that so many of you are here tonight because this is what Christ commands. He says, "Do this," imperative, "Do this in remembrance of me."

So having put our faith in Christ, the perfect lamb sacrificed for our sins, knowing that he has appointed this remembrance for us to recall his death on our behalf, we know that we are in the middle of what God would have us to do this evening as we come to the table of communion. Behold the Lamb.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for giving Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We thank you that he has taken our sin away. We pray for those who do not know him, perhaps some with us even in this room. God, just as you had mercy on us, have mercy on them in this hour. God, surely you haven't exhausted all of your mercy. Surely there is no more grace to be found at your throne, not while Christ intercedes for sinners before you, Father. There is more grace to be had. We're confident of it and we ask you to extend it even this evening. As Christ is lifted up, our Father, draw men and women unto thee. Through the blood of your precious Lamb we pray. Amen.

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