

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (3-02-1991 Cleland Baptist Church)

John 1:29-36

Additional Reading: Genesis 22:6-8, 13,14; Exodus 12:3-13; Isaiah 53:7-9,12

The Lamb of God

We are very familiar with the phrase “the Lamb of God”. When we open the Bible the figure of the lamb is everywhere – from the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19), the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:1-30), and lambs in the Temple offering daily morning and evening. In prophecy, the servant of the Lord was **led like a lamb to the slaughter** (Isaiah 53:7). **Behold the Lamb** (John 1:29). Philip explains the book of Isaiah to the Ethiopian eunuch – **As a sheep before her shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth** (Isaiah 53:7, Acts 8 26-40). **A lamb without blemish or defect** (1 Peter 1:19). The book of Revelation uses the phrase 29 times – the Lamb’s Book of Life, the Lamb’s marriage supper, the blood of the Lamb, the wrath of the Lamb, Worthy is the Lamb...

But of them all, perhaps the most astounding statement is John’s **Behold the Lamb**. Important not to let familiarity with the phrase blur its significance and glory. It deserves to be constantly thought of and meditated on. One of the highest peaks in the mountain range of Scripture. It comes from the ministry of John the Baptist. His task was to bear witness to Christ; he was the morning star heralding the dawn. This was the most important thing he said about Christ, the greatest of all subjects.

Old Testament background of this statement

What was the source of this glorious statement? What did John mean by it? What was his audience’s understanding of the term? It was more than just that Jesus was meek and gentle like a lamb. The Old Testament had many references to the lamb, but three main ideas.

- (a) History. Story of the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22) – he innocently asks “We have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?” The answer – “My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering”. Then the ram was found, and offered in place of Isaac.
- (b) Ritual of Old Testament. The Passover lamb had to be without blemish. Blood was put on two doorposts and the lintel. When the Lord went through Egypt striking down the firstborn – when He saw the house with blood on the door, he promised, “I will pass over you” (Exodus 12). So Passover Lamb’s blood meant deliverance and salvation.
- (c) Prophecy. The servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53 was led like a lamb to the slaughter. In His death He bore the sin of many, i.e. He paid the penalty in their place.

In summary, the Old Testament taught that God provided the Lamb, it was sinless and spotless, it died in the place of men, it brought deliverance from death and destruction because its blood was shed. So John the Baptist’s phrase “Lamb of God” was rich in Old Testament pictures – reminding the audience of history, ritual and prophecy. The

Old Testament pictures were foreshadowing the coming of Christ, and gave a clue to the meaning of His title “the Lamb of God”.

His work was to be fulfilment of Old Testament history, ritual and prophecy. In the Old Testament we have the shadow, in the New Testament we have the substance. Inseparably bound together – demonstrating the wonderful unity of the Bible. Augustine put it this way: “In the Old Testament, the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament, the Old Testament is revealed”. On the walk to Emmaus, the disciples were puzzled about Christ’s sufferings and death. Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, Jesus expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

The meaning of the statement

Need to go deeper than the Old Testament pictures, need to get behind the words to the real meaning of Christ’s sufferings as the Lamb of God. We cannot be vague about the Cross, it is central to the Christian message, and it is the heart of the Gospel. The doctrine of sin is the key – an understanding of man’s sin, guilt, despair, prospect of eternal banishment from the presence of God. Must have a right knowledge of sin to understand all-saving Christianity.

The Biblical picture of sin - guilt, rebellion against God who is holy. We are utter failures when faced with the demands of God’s law. Our relationship with God is broken. Under His condemnation. The most serious matter in the universe, the greatest problem in life and human history. We are helpless in the face of this plight. Our respectability, morality, best resolutions, religious practices – none of these will help us. We cannot escape the wages of sin, which is death.

By what right can we expect forgiveness and acceptance by God? We have no right. All we can justly expect is condemnation. Nothing is less obvious, and more surprising, than forgiveness. An amazing miracle here. Sin cannot be overlooked, justice must be carried out, and the Law must be upheld. What we sow, we reap. In this dangerous and desperate situation, the Good News of the Gospel suddenly makes sense. We see the truth in all its glory. **The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world** (John 1:29).

The Lamb of God, **chosen before the creation of the world** (1 Peter 1:20). God foresaw the entrance of sin and the fall of man, and drew up His plan before creation. Then in the fullness of time, and in great grace, God sent into the world His coequal Son – the Lamb of God. On the Cross He bore sins. **The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all** (Isaiah 53:6). He was made sin for us. He took that load under which we were staggering, and which was crushing us to hell. The penalty was borne. Though He personally was sinless – the Lamb without blemish and spot – He took our sins and their penalty.

*“At one triumphant draught of love
He drank damnation dry”*

He suffered the wages of sin. He took the just penalty of the Law. He met the demands of God's justice. The result is free and righteous forgiveness; man is brought back to God.

Thus Christ is the Lamb, which God provided, which died in our place, and therefore we are passed over and saved from eternal destruction.

His death covered sin in all its totality, ugliness, curse, shame, abomination, degradation and full penalty. His death was sufficient to cover the sins of all men. Sufficient for all, suitable for all, offered to all. It was effective to take away the sins of His people, those who place faith in Him. One perfect atonement for sin to which all sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed. He made one sacrifice for sins forever.

Because of His death, God completely forgives the sins of those who lean their whole weight on Him. On the basis of His death, our sins are taken away **as far as the East is from the West, so far has he removed our transgressions from us** (Psalm 103:12). **You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea** (Micah 7:19). **You have cast all my sins behind your back** (Isaiah 38:17). **I have blotted out like a thick cloud your sins** (Isaiah 44:22). **Through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins** (Acts 13:38). **There is therefore now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus** (Romans 8:1).

Words from Pilgrim's Progress: "Christian ran till he came to a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below in the bottom a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the Cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre where it fell in and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart 'He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death'. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy and went on singing."

The merit of His death ever avails. It was done once for all, and yet is ever effective. The blood of Christ cleanses – and keeps on cleansing – us from all sin. It takes away the sins of the world. No hope for any outside of this atonement. There is no other atonement or satisfaction for sin. Doing our best, religious ceremonies, purgatory, good intentions – all are useless. Here is the one way to heaven – salvation in no other. **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:12).

He has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He takes our load, bares our curse, pays our debts, and endures our penalty. Therefore He offers real and not vague forgiveness and pardon. He is our complete and adequate Saviour. God was fully satisfied with Christ's atonement. And so should our conscience be.

Adoniram Judson, returned from Burma, addressing a large congregation in America. He gave them a Gospel message, and then sat down. Someone near him suggested the congregation would be disappointed, expecting to hear something more interesting from him. Judson's reply, "I have spoken to them to the best of my ability the most interesting subject in the world. Could I have done better?" "Yes, but after so long abroad they wanted to hear an interesting story and not only the Gospel". Judson

arose, “I do not know anything half so good for you to hear or half so interesting as the love of Christ in dying to save sinners.”

Application of the statement

Behold the Lamb of God – who was provided by God, died in our place, bore our sins, delivered us from sin and destruction. This message must be at the centre of our ministry. There is so much we can say about Him, His wonderful person, glorious character, His teaching and example – but above all, we must major on His atoning work and Saviourhood.

*“Tis all my business here below
To cry ‘Behold the Lamb!’ ”*

Our principle business is to be like John the Baptist and proclaim Him as the Lamb. It is not oratorical fireworks people need, but for the Cross to be lifted up. Must do so habitually, continually and earnestly.

All people of God must return to this subject again and again. The Cross enables us to persevere, advance and conquer. It is comforting to know He is familiar with our sorrows, His faithfulness to death, and His courage in serving God. It is our grounds for assurance. Our salvation does not depend on us, our feelings, our ups and downs, and our experiences – but on the solid rock of Christ’s finished work. Not what I *do*, but what He has *done*. Be committed to the Gospel, it is worth living for and dying for.

To the unsaved, you need to realise Christ is your only hope. Look at Him, and not at your own self, your own righteousness, sacraments, religion or rituals. If you refuse His free pardon and despise His sin-bearing death, turn your back on the Lamb who died for your sins, then you will not be passed over on the day of judgement. You will bear the weight of your own sins. If your debt has not been paid, your sin has not been cleansed, how will you face God on that day? **He who believes in the Son has everlasting life. He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him**” (John 3:36).

God has appointed His Son as the only way of salvation. Let this truth enter your heart as well as your head.

*“Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream.
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him”*

Conclusion

Behold the Lamb of God. The gift of God’s love. He bore our sins in our place. Hence He gives salvation and deliverance from destruction. Behold Him. **Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other** (Isaiah 45:22).

*“But Christ the heavenly lamb
Takes all our guilt away.
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.
My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine
While like a penitent I stand
And there confess my sin.
Believing we rejoice
To see the curse removed.
We bless the lamb with cheerful voice
And sing His bleeding love.
(Isaac Watts)*