

## The Lamb of God

John 1:29

We read in Acts 8 about Philip encountering a eunuch from Ethiopia, who was sitting in his chariot reading from the prophecy of Isaiah. And Philip went up to him asking him if he understood what he was reading. And the marvelous answer was this, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53, the text I read earlier in our worship this morning. And he didn't know who Isaiah was talking about. "Was the prophet speaking about himself or someone else?" he asked.

So what did Philip do? He preached Jesus to that man, beginning right there, in the OT book of Isaiah. From the whole Bible, which was just the OT at that point, from the whole OT, Peter preached Jesus to this man. And the man was brought to salvation, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and was baptized right on the spot.

That's the model and definition of evangelism, isn't it? We open the Bible and tell people about Jesus. And we ought to use the OT as the starting point, and use the NT to explain and interpret the Old. And that is precisely what I intend to do this morning. Our text is only one verse, a verse so significant, so rich in biblical imagery and biblical references, that I chose to devote an entire sermon to it. But actually, we'll not be looking too much at that one verse, John 1:29. Instead, we'll be looking at four other references, from the OT, which are the basis of John's words when he says, "Behold! The lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Really a subject sermon, and the subject is the Lamb of God.

I will preach Jesus to you today. And say to you, clearly, plainly, and directly, "Behold! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

But why is Jesus called the lamb? I've identified four other biblical references to the lamb of God, each one teaching us something about Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, the commentators debate and discuss which of these references John actually has in mind, and some try to pick one above the others. But several of the commentators reach a wise conclusion--there is no reason to pick just one. John knew the OT, and we don't need to think that he was thinking of just one of these references. So for our study, we will look at them all.

The first reference to the lamb of God is the lamb of the burnt offering. And Jesus is that lamb.

### I. JESUS IS THE LAMB FOR THE BURNT OFFERING.

In the OT, though, it was a real animal, an animal killed as a sacrifice.

Num.28:1 "Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Command the children of Israel, and say to them, 'My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time.' 3 "And you shall say to them, 'This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. 4 'The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, 5 'and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. 6 'It is a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. 7 'And its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in a holy

place you shall pour out the drink to the LORD as an offering. 8 'The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; as the morning grain offering and its drink offering, you shall offer it as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.'

What was the significance of the OT burnt offering? The burnt offering was often called the whole offering, or the whole burnt offering, because the whole animal was offered to God. The whole animal, one without defect, the best of the animals, was given entirely to God. As an act of faith and devotion. For God's pleasure.

Notice how it is described in Numbers 28, verse 2. And verse 6. Also verse 8. "A sweet aroma."

The emphasis of this sacrifice was the delight which the Lord took in it. The delight he took in the sweet smelling aroma of the animal which was symbolically devoted entirely to him.

And why such pleasure? Because the devotion of the whole animal demonstrated the devotion of the whole life of the person offering it. And with such devotion, the Lord takes great pleasure.

This burnt offering is, perhaps, the primary sacrifice which the people of the OT were commanded to offer. It is the prime sacrifice which represented the relationship of God's people to their God. It was the basis upon which God declared the blessing of his presence with his people.

Ex. 29:42 "This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet you to speak with you. 43 "And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory."

The altar of the burnt offering was the place where God would first meet with his people, and without that sacrifice, he would not meet with them! Without the full and total devotion of his people, God does not wish to meet with them.

But with that sacrifice, what great blessing.

v.44 "So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also consecrate both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests. 45 "I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. 46 "And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the LORD their God."

Think of the NT description of this spiritual act of worship, the living sacrifice described in,

Rom. 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God —this is your spiritual act of worship."

So we are called to devote our whole lives to God as a whole burnt offering. But more than that, with the OT image fresh in your mind, you need to realize ultimately that,

#### **A. God provides the sacrifice of the burnt offering.**

Think of the greatest burnt offering given to God in the OT. Can you think of what it was? It wasn't a lamb that would be sacrificed. It was a young boy. And it wasn't a priest offering it at the temple. It was the boy's father.

Abraham.

Gen.22:6 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. 7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I

am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.

The story is so familiar,

v.9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. 10 And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." 12 And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided."

The act which brought the Lord such pleasure was the total sacrifice of Abraham.

v.12

And Abraham performed that act of obedience, that sacrifice, with complete faith.

v.8 "God will provide."

v.14 And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided."

Of course, God did provide. Abraham didn't sacrifice Isaac.

God gave him a ram to offer. But God provided a greater sacrifice. A greater burnt offering. Jesus himself. In the flesh.

Jesus' sacrifice of his own life was more than a satisfaction of God's wrath and justice. It was that. But it was more. It was a burnt offering, a perfect, and complete offering of a life to God. Jesus' death was a burnt offering, one which brought pleasure to the father. For,

### **B. God is pleased with the sacrifice of a burnt offering.**

Turn with me to,

Eph.5:1 "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."

We'll see in just a few moments how Jesus' death was a sacrifice to pay the penalty of our sins and to satisfy the demands of justice. But here Paul presents Jesus' death as a burnt offering. A sweet-smelling aroma. And in that sense, he tells us, "Be imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us..."

Now, you cannot imitate Christ in his sacrifice of propitiation, in the sacrifice of appeasing God's wrath and justice. Nothing you do can ever atone for your sins in that way. But you can imitate Christ in the total surrender of his whole life to God as a burnt offering. Again the words of Romans 12, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God."

And the words of,

Gal.2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

People of God, as you behold the lamb of God, understand that he is Jesus, and he is the lamb for the burnt offering. An aroma pleasing to God. And you are to be imitators of him, offering your whole life, your whole life to God. Not just a part of it. Not just some of your time. Not just some of your money. Or some of your energy. Or some of your abilities and gifts. Not some of your body nor just some of your mind. And not just a part of your heart.

EVERYTHING! Everything. Following the example of Jesus, the lamb of God.

So Jesus is the lamb for the burnt offering. Secondly,

## **II. JESUS IS THE PASSOVER LAMB.**

What was the passover? It was the celebration that marked the occasion of God delivering his people out of Egypt. We read of that event in,

Ex.12:1 “Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2 "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3 "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. 4 ‘And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man’s need you shall make your count for the lamb. 5 ‘Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 ‘Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. 7 ‘And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. 8

‘Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 ‘Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire--its head with its legs and its entrails. 10 ‘You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 11 ‘And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’S Passover. 12 ‘For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. 13 ‘Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”

And just so you fully believe my point, that that passover lamb represents Jesus, I’ll read,

1Cor. 5:6 “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? 7 Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast —as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

Now, what was important about that passover lamb? Well, the historical event is quite clear. Let’s look at it. First,

### **A. The blood of the lamb protects us from God’s wrath and judgment.**

Protection.

God’s wrath would come to Egypt, in the tenth and final plague. The firstborn of every family would be killed. Every family except those families who sprinkled the blood of the lamb

upon their doorposts.

Ex.12:12-13 "I will pass over you..."

v.21 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. 22 "And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. 23 "For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you."

The passover was a literal act of God. He went through Egypt to every house with the judgment of death, and literally passed over those marked with the blood. Such an obvious symbolism, isn't it?

v.23 "For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you."

The blood of the lamb protects us from the destroyer! The curse of death shall not strike those protected by the blood.

So what happened after the death of the firstborn throughout Egypt? Well, Pharaoh changed his mind and let the people of Israel go. He'd had enough.

v.29 "And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in

the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. 30 So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. 31 Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. 32 "Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." 33 And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." 34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders."

And the symbolism is just about as clear. The passover was an act of deliverance, deliverance out of the land of slavery. It would retain that symbolism throughout the history of Israel, as a perpetual sign of God's hand at work.

v.26 "And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' 27 "that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'" So the people bowed their heads and worshiped."

Deliverance. Deliverance from slavery. For the people of Israel, that slavery was the nation of Egypt. Yet when we realize Christ is our passover lamb, we see that,

**B. The blood of the lamb redeems us from slavery to sin and death.**

Egypt represented slavery. Spiritual slavery. Slavery to sin. Slavery to death. With no escape possible in our own power.

We must be redeemed! By the blood of the lamb.

Back in John 1:29. “Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” He takes sin away. He redeems us from its power and its dominion, so that we are no longer slaves to sin. No longer held in slavery to death as the consequences of sin.

Let me explain that redemption in the words of Paul to the church at Ephesus.

Eph.1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

In Christ, you have been redeemed. Redeemed by the blood of the lamb. Freed from the slavery to sin and death. And freed from its curse. For,

### **C. The blood of the lamb cleanses us from the guilt of sin.**

“He takes away the sin of the world.” He takes away its guilt.

1 Peter 1:18 “...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

And in cleansing us from the guilt of sin, we read in Acts 20:28 that Jesus bought the church with his own blood. He bought us. That’s what it means to redeem. But we weren’t bought back from Satan. We were bought back from God the judge. We were ransomed out of the sentence of death justly imposed upon us because of our sin.

We were bought with the blood of Jesus, cleansed of our sin by the blood of the lamb.

Now, there is an immediate ethical application to that doctrine.

1Cor. 6:19 “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

And the verse just before that,

1 Cor.6:18 “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”

Contrary to the great American way, you are not your own. Your body is not your own. You were bought. And you belong to someone else. If you are a Christian, you belong to God! You are redeemed from slavery to sin and cleansed of its guilt, and now, now you are His. You are a bondservant. A slave. You belong to the God who bought you!

“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

Or in the words of,

Rom. 6:11 “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”

It can’t be said any clearer. “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.” For Jesus, your passover lamb, has been sacrificed for you.

Well, we come to the most familiar, and probably the most obvious reference in John's identification of the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and that is a reference to the lamb of Isaiah 53, the lamb that was led to the slaughter.

### **III. JESUS IS THE LAMB THAT WAS LED TO THE SLAUGHTER.**

Is.53:3 "He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken."

Now, we could obviously spent the whole time this evening just on this one passage, and not begin to exhaust the meaning and significance of it. So we will just scratch the surface tonight, though scratching deep enough to see Jesus as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Look at,

Look carefully at those words. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." What do they mean? Simply this, and I hope you grasp in incredible significance of what I am about to say, for this is the gospel.

Right at its heart. Right at the center of everything that you read in the Bible. The truth of Christianity all focuses upon this one idea,

#### **A. Jesus endured and satisfied the painful wrath and curse of God.**

He endured God's wrath and curse. For our sins. He was "stricken by God." He was "smitten by God," struck down as a footnote explains. He was stricken by God.

He was put to death by God, suffering at God's hands his deepest pain, the pain of enduring God's wrath and curse. The pain so adequately summarized by those great words on the cross, quoting from Psalm 22, during those hours of darkness, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Jesus, the eternal son of God, was forsaken by his father. He endured the painful wrath and curse of God which our sins had earned. It was the curse of the covenant, the covenant penalty which we had incurred. God paid it.

And he satisfied that curse, so that we will never have to endure it ourselves. The sacrifice was paid "once and for all," as the book of Hebrews emphasizes so frequently. Once for all. He paid the price, once for all.

Hebr. 9:12 "He did not enter [the Most Holy Place] by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered..once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Once for all. That's what's wrong with the Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass, where Christ is believed to be sacrificed again. That's what's wrong with thinking that might someone atone for your own sins, or do some sort of penance or good

works to try to make up for what you've done. That's what's wrong when you say, "I can't forgive myself," when you can't undo something you've done wrong.

Jesus Christ did it all. Once for all. And he did it as a substitute, a representative for others.

Is. 53:5 "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities."

### **B. Jesus was a substitutionary sacrifice for us.**

There is a big word theologians use for substitutionary, it's the word vicarious. And you might have heard the expression, "vicarious atonement." That means simply this, your sins were atoned for, the penalty and punishment you deserved was paid for, by someone else. Someone acting in your place. Someone serving as your substitute.

And so we read this about the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,

Is.53:5 "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 ...And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

People of God, if those verses don't stir your heart, then nothing will. And if those verses don't stir you on to greater love and obedience, then you need to confess to God the sin of coldness in your heart.

These verses are so personal. So intimate. So gripping. So encouraging. And so humbling.

"Behold! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

The message of the gospel begins with a simply point. You are a sinner. You have sinned, and have fallen short of the glory of God. And without Christ, you live under his wrath and cursed, doomed to an eternity in hell which you deserve because of your sins. In fact, we all deserve that condemnation.

But Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away that sin. He satisfied the painful wrath of God and suffered the sentence of condemnation. He was condemned in our place. As our substitute. And so you must receive him into your heart and believe upon him, trusting in him alone for salvation. Not upon yourself or your own works.

In him, and in him alone, there is life. Eternal life.

1 John 5:11 "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

Jesus is the lamb that was led to the slaughter. "He poured out his soul unto death. He was numbered with the transgressors. He bore the sin of many. He made intercession for the transgressors."

One final point, and I won't linger here long but I want to end with this emphasis, this final reference to the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And this a future reference.

### **IV. JESUS IS THE LAMB WHO SHALL BE WORSHIPED IN THE FULLNESS OF GLORY.**

Rev. 5:6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth...11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" 13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" 14 Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever."

And so the lamb who was slain will be the lamb who is worshiped, and because he was slain, he is worthy to be worshiped.

#### **A. Jesus is worthy to receive all glory.**

We join that chorus every time we gather together to worship, worshipping the one who has saved us from our sins. And you can read about that salvation in,

Rev.7:9 "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

We shall reign on the earth, with Jesus. The lamb who was

slain shall be the ruler of the whole earth, gathering and leading his people from every nation and every tribe. For,

#### **B. Jesus, the lamb of God, will accomplish the salvation of all God's chosen people.**

He makes us kings and priests to our God. So worship him.

One final reference to the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, a reference to the new Jerusalem, a description of our eternal home in the new heavens and new earth,

Rev.21:22 "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. 24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. 25 Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). 26 And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. 27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

So this morning we join the angels in heaven standing around the throne, and join the four living creatures who fall upon their faces, and worship God,

Rev.7:12 "saying: Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom. Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. AMEN."