

The Perfect Christ
John 1:29-34
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In the rolling hills just outside Bethlehem, under a canopy of stars in the cool night air, a group of shepherds kept careful watch over their flock. These fields were only a few miles from Jerusalem, and some scholars believe many of the young lambs bleating softly in the darkness would eventually be offered as blood sacrifices in the Temple to provide a temporary covering for the people's sins. As a result, these spotless and unblemished lambs were vigilantly protected from injury or harm.

Nearby stood an ancient watchtower, what the prophets called Migdal Eder, known as "the tower of the flock." Some believed the Messiah would be revealed from this tower as prophesied in Micah 4:8: ***"And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem."***

As the night deepened, the shepherds warmed themselves around a small fire, their staffs close at hand, eyes scanning the shadows for predators. They knew the weight of their task. A single flaw, like a bruise or a scratch, could disqualify a lamb from sacrifice. They inspected each newborn with care, wrapping the most perfect in strips of cloth to protect them, ensuring nothing marred their purity before the priests claimed them for the holy rites. These lower-class men lived on the margins, often looked down upon, yet their work sustained the very heart of Israel's worship: the constant reminder that sin required a cost, that reconciliation demanded a spotless substitute.

Little did they know, on this ordinary and silent night, that the heavens were about to bust open with good news of great joy that would forever change their world, and ours. Imagine their unbridled awe and sense of wonder when the angel suddenly appeared and declared, ***"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*** (Luke 2:11)

Immediately, the shepherds left their valuable flock behind and went with haste to find the perfect Lamb of God swaddled snugly in strips of cloth and lying in a feeding trough. I wonder if, as they stood there, some of them recalled occasions when fragile newborn lambs were carefully wrapped and gently placed in mangers where they could be protected from the cold and the danger of the night.

Isn't it intriguing that the perfect "Lamb of God" was born in the area set aside for sheep to be sacrificed? The shepherds who watched lambs born to die were invited to witness the birth of the newborn lamb of God, born to die, and to live again, so substitutionary sacrifices would never be needed again.

We're continuing in our series called, "Behold the Wonder" from the first chapter of John. Two weeks ago, we focused on the Lord who is the Word who created the world. Last weekend, we considered the Lord who is Light and Life. Today I'm praying we will be captured by the wonder of the Lord who is the Lamb of God.

John the Baptist, the forerunner to Christ, had been testifying to Jesus being the light of the world and just denied being the Messiah himself in John 1:19-28. For our purposes today, we're going to unpack one primary verse. I invite you to turn to John 1:29: "***The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'***"

Here's our main idea: *Behold and believe in the Lamb of God so He will lift away your sin.*

Let's consider this verse closely.

1. The Urgent Look. The phrase, "***the next day***" refers to the day after the religious leaders questioned John. It was also the day after Jesus returned from His 40-day temptation in the wilderness. This helps us see how the Savior stepped into time and space. Christianity is not a myth or a legend but is rooted in history. Jesus was born on a specific day, He walked toward John on a precise day, He died on a particular day, He was raised three days later, He ascended on an exact day, and He will return on a definite day.

We see this in Galatians 4:4: "***But when the fullness of TIME had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.***" The phrase, "the fullness of time" is a very eloquent expression which means something is complete and fully developed, like ripe fruit ready to be picked. It was also used of a pregnant woman experiencing labor pains. The stage was perfectly set for the Savior to be sent as we see in Luke 2:6: "***And while they were there, the TIME came for her to give birth.***"

Notice next that Jesus was "***coming toward him.***" John didn't go looking for Jesus but rather, Jesus sought him out. In a similar way, we don't climb up to God; He

comes down to us. Luke 19:10 says, ***“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*** One pastor writes, *“Christmas is the end of thinking you are better than someone else, because Christmas is telling you that you could never get to heaven on your own. God had to come to you.”* Before we ever move toward Christ, He has already moved toward us.

The word ***“behold”*** has several nuances. It means, *“to perceive through sight, to peer, to spy out, to gaze intently upon, to observe fully.”* It expresses strong feelings of surprise, hope, expectation, and certainty. It has the idea of vividness and emotional urgency and is used in the imperative, meaning it’s a command. It’s variously translated as *“Look! See! Pay attention! Take notice! Don’t miss this!”* The word ***“behold”*** is designed to grab attention and to signal that what follows is important, surprising, and worthy of reflection.

When Mary was told what was about to happen, the angel used the word “behold” in Luke 1:31: ***“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”*** When giving the news to Joseph, the Angel of the Lord used “behold” in Matthew 1:23: ***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.”*** An angel also said “behold” when speaking to the shepherds in Luke 2:10: ***“...Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.”*** The angel is saying something like this: *“Look right here and pay close attention so you don’t miss this! Something stunning and joy-giving is about to happen!”*

In each case, everyone who was approached by an angel was called to perceive, believe, and receive this good news. Between now and Christmas, let’s behold the lamb of God in the manger, let’s concentrate on the awe of the incarnation, on the wonder of what took place in Mary’s womb.

Here are some truths that should grip us and grab our attention. Let’s behold them together and believe them firmly:

*The Sovereign became the sacrifice.
The Great “I AM” chose to become incarnate.
Not presents beneath a tree,
but God’s presence upon a tree.*

*The Immortal clothed Himself in mortality.
The Word stepped into the world He spoke into being.*

*The Maker of man became man,
without surrendering His deity.*

*The Creator came into His creation.
The Sinless One stood in the place of sinners.
The Shepherd became the Lamb.
The Judge bore the judgment we deserve.
The King laid aside His crown to wear our curse.*

*The Infinite became an infant (John 1:1-3).
The Light of the world entered our darkness so we might live (John 1:4-13).
Behold! Lord God became the Lamb of God who takes away our sin (John
1:29).*

Matt Papa writes, “Christianity’s first call is not ‘Behave!’ but ‘Behold!’” Once we behold, we will believe...and then we’ll behave. We must keep the order straight or we’ll turn into religious legalists, focusing more on what we must do and less on what has already been done for us. There is nothing more practical than beholding and believing God, for until we do, we won’t know how to behave.

Most of us don’t do near enough beholding because we’re holding on too tightly to many things which have a hold on us. Some time ago I heard this statement: “*We become what we behold. Tell me what you’re beholding, and I’ll tell you what you’re becoming.*”

What are you beholding right now?

Behold and believe in the Lamb of God so He will lift away your sin.

2. The Unique Lamb. After calling for our attention, John tells us who to behold: “...*the Lamb of God.*” Notice he doesn’t say, “*a lamb,*” but “*the Lamb.*” We’re not to behold the teacher or the miracle worker, but we are to behold the lamb. Jesus is the *supreme* and *final* Lamb provided by God. Those from a Jewish background would have thought of the lamb sacrificed at Passover. Their minds would have went to sacrifice, blood, and substitution. That very morning, a lamb was offered as a sacrifice in the Temple. Another lamb would be sacrificed at twilight. The same thing happened the day before and would happen the next day and the next and the next...until Jesus the final Lamb would shed His blood on our behalf.

In addition, this is the Lamb ***“of God,”*** emphasizing the provision of God. This lamb belongs to God and is given by God as a substitute sacrifice. As John 3:16 says, Jesus is God’s gift to us. It’s not about what we offer to God, but about the gift of God given to us as we read in Romans 8:32: ***“He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?”***

My mind goes to Genesis 22:7 when Isaac asked his father Abraham where the sacrifice was: ***“Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”*** Abraham’s answer in verse 8 is a stunning statement of faith: ***“God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”*** The Lord *Himself* would provide the substitutionary ram as sacrifice for *Himself*! Jesus was sent from God at Christmas and died on Good Friday to satisfy God’s holy and righteous wrath.

In the Passover, it was the blood of a lamb that caused the angel of death to *pass over* the people (Exodus 12). Someone said it like this: *“In every home that night, death would come. The only question was where. Either a lamb would die, or the firstborn son would die. Blood had to be shed either way. The issue was never whether death would occur, but who would die in their place. God made it clear: without the shedding of blood, judgment would fall. Salvation rested not on the worthiness of the family inside the house, but on the application of the blood sacrifice, the lamb who served as substitute for their sins.”*

Isaiah 53:7, written 700 years before Jesus was born, declares that the Messiah would be ***“like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.”*** Verse 12 tells us why Jesus died: ***“Because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”***

In the Book of Revelation, the ***“Lamb”*** is the most frequent title for Jesus, used 28 different times! Echoing Isaac’s question about where the lamb was for the sacrifice, in Revelation 5:2, a mighty angel asks, ***“Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?”*** When no one was found worthy, the Apostle John began to weep loudly. At that moment, one of the elders said these glorious words in verse 5: ***“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.”*** In verse 6 we read, ***“And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain...”***

BTW, we'll be kicking off a verse-by-verse study in Revelation the first weekend in January. I encourage you to check out this week's podcast on the Edgewood YouTube channel for an interview with EBC member Duane Roesner, who is leading one of our men's groups through this book.

Warren Wiersbe captures it well: *"The people of Israel were familiar with lambs for the sacrifices. At Passover, each family had to have a lamb; and during the year, two lambs a day were sacrificed at the temple altar, plus all the other lambs brought for personal sacrifices. Those lambs were brought by men to men, but here is God's Lamb, given by God to men! Those lambs could not take away sin, but the Lamb of God can take away sin."*

Behold and believe in the Lamb of God so He will lift away your sin.

3. The Unmatched Liberation. John 1:29 concludes with this definitive statement about forgiveness: *"...who takes away the sin of the world."* The phrase, *"takes away"* is multifaceted and means: *"to take up, to take away and place on oneself."* It's in the present tense, signifying the ongoing sufficiency and availability of Jesus to continuously take away our sins yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Jesus takes away our sin and places all of them upon Himself. He did not merely overlook human transgression, but actively "lifted" the weight of our despicable depravity and bore it upon Himself. Jesus is not interested in managing our sins or redefining them; He came as the Lamb of God to completely remove them.

Note that the word *"sin"* is in the singular, signifying the totality of humanity's condition of depravity. Jesus heaps together all the trillions of sins in human history into one gigantic pile. He forgives our individual sins (1 Peter 2:24), and our inborn sin that we inherited from Adam (Romans 5:18). Our root issue is separation from God because we are sinners, rather than just our individual acts of sin.

Christmas at its core is all about Jesus coming to forgive sinners who sin as we read in Matthew 1:21: *"She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."* Hebrews 9:26: *"...He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."* 1 John 3:5 says, *"You know that He appeared in order to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin."*

While Jesus came to save His people from their sins, He also came to take ***“away the sin of the world.”*** We see right from the beginning of the nativity narrative that the gospel is global in scope. Let’s ponder these passages and allow them to create within us wonder and worship.

- Luke 2:10: ***“And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’”***
- Luke 2:30-33: ***“For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”***
- Matthew 2:1-2 says: ***“...behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.’”*** Before the church was sent to the nations, the nations were already coming to worship the Christ Child.
- John 1:9: ***“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”***
- Revelation 5:9: ***“...for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”***

Jesus came for religious and irreligious people, for those on the margins of life like unclean shepherds, and for pagan astrologers from a faraway land. He came for you and for me and for everyone on the globe.

Think about the timing of Jesus’ death. While Jesus was on the Cross, a multitude of priests were in the Temple getting ready to make the normal evening sacrifice. Since this was the Passover, there was a heightened awareness and a sense of awe as the Passover Lamb was about to be sacrificed. The Bible tells us that Jesus died at 3:00 p.m. on Friday. Friends, that was the time the priests would have been preparing the evening sacrifice! I can’t help but wonder if the Passover Lamb jumped off the altar and scampered to freedom that day because the true Lamb of God had finished the sacrifice once for all? Someone said it like this, ***“As priests prepared the Passover sacrifice that afternoon, Heaven declared the sacrifice complete when Jesus gave up His life.”***

The symbolism is profound. Hebrews 9:12 says: ***“He [Jesus] did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.”*** Through the blood of Jesus, our sins have been paid, and we can now experience forgiveness

and eternal life. According to Hebrews 10:10, Jesus was the final sacrifice for our sins: “...*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*”

Jesus did not die as just another sacrifice, but as the final, perfect one, once for all. Because of His death, believers can now enter God’s presence, and the old sacrificial system is no longer needed. The sacrifices stopped not because sin disappeared, but because the Savior appeared. What was once repeated endlessly was completed eternally at the cross.

John the Baptist recognized in Jesus Christ the Lamb of God who would lift away the sin of the world, satisfying God’s holy and righteous justice. In like manner, Jesus is now the means of sparing those of us who will apply His blood in order that the judgment of God might pass us over.

I appreciate Ray Pritchard’s insight in a post this week: “The Nicene Creed explains Christmas this way: ‘*He came down for us and for our salvation.*’” Every part of that sentence matters.

- Christmas is *personal*: “He” came down.
- Christmas is *purposeful*: He “came” down.
- Christmas is *descending*: He came “down.”
- Christmas is *relational*: “For us.”
- Christmas is *redemptive*: “For our salvation.”

Jesus died for the whole world, but you must believe it personally for it to be activated and applied to your life. Listen again to Luke 2:11: “**Today** [right now; a specific time in history] **in the town of David** [fulfilling a 700-year-old prophecy from Micah 5:2] **a Savior** [the One who saves from sin] **has been born** [the incarnation] **to you**; [emphatic; personally for you] **He is Christ** [the long-awaited Anointed One; the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament] **the Lord** [YHWH, Jehovah, the Great I Am, Sovereign, Master and Leader].”

Jesus was born to the whole world, but He was also born to you...and for you. Because of grace, He died in your place.

- Is He “Savior” to you?
- Is He “Christ” to you?
- Is He “Lord” to you?

Corrie ten Boom said it well: *“Christmas must become personal, or it remains only historical...if Jesus were born one thousand times in Bethlehem and not in me, then I would still be lost.”*

He is *with you* through His birth. Make sure He is *in you* through the new birth. And then allow Him to work *through you* in your life.

John the Baptist would never forget the day that Jesus walked toward him and sought him out. If we drop down to John 1:35-36, we’ll see what happened the very next day when Jesus was walking by him: ***“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’”***

Verse 37 helps us see we must do more than behold from a distance; we must also believe and behave accordingly: ***“The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.”*** When these two men, who were aligned with John, looked up and saw the Lamb of God, they left John to follow Jesus. The same call comes to us. We must put our faith in Jesus *and* follow Him. We’re to believe *and* obey. It’s not enough to just decide to say yes to Jesus; we must determine to follow Him as a disciple. As Kyle Idleman says, we’re called to be followers, not just fans of Jesus.

On a bitterly cold January morning in 1850, a fifteen-year-old boy was trying to get to church. A snowstorm forced him down a side street and into a tiny chapel where only a dozen people were present. The pastor himself hadn’t made it because of the weather, so an untrained and nervous layman stood up to preach.

His text was Isaiah 45:22: ***“Look unto Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth.”*** The sermon was simple, and he only spoke for ten minutes (imagine that). He kept repeating one simple word: *Look!*

“My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pain. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just, ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to college to look...anyone can look; even a child can look.”

As he concluded, the preacher fixed his eyes on the young visitor and said: *“Young man, you look very miserable. And you always will be miserable—miserable in life*

and miserable in death—if you do not obey this text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.”

Then the preacher leaned in and said these words, “*Young man, look to Jesus Christ! Look! Look! Look!*” The young boy later said, “*I had been waiting to do fifty things, but I did look. And then and there the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and in that moment, I saw the sun.*”

That boy was Charles Spurgeon who went on to preach 3,500 sermons to about 10 million individual people, often preaching up to 10-13 times a week.

Behold and believe in the Lamb of God so He will lift away your sin.

Look to the Lamb who is Lord and be saved from your sins right now.

“Jesus, I’m tired of so many other things taking my attention, leaving me distracted and disheartened. I confess that my sinfulness has left me stumbling through life. I’m lost and want to turn around. I repent of how I’ve been living, and I choose to behold You, the Lamb of God. Thank You for coming into our world and for dying on the cross as my substitute and for being raised on the third day. I believe You are Lord, You are Life, You are Light, and You are the Lamb of God. I now receive You into my life. Please save me from my sins and give me what I need to live under Your leadership so I can follow You for the rest of my life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”