

## Sermon for Good Friday

### The Sacrificed Lamb Isaiah 53:4-7a

It was Sunday afternoon. John's gospel indicates that it was five days before the Passover (John 12:1, 12). Since the Passover always falls on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the Jewish month of Nisan, this Sunday would have been the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, in itself a significant day in the Jewish calendar. At the time of the Exodus God had stipulated that on Nisan 10 the head of every household should select a lamb for his family's Passover observance (Exodus 12:3). And so, on that Sunday afternoon, flocks of Passover lambs from the pastures surrounding Jerusalem, thousands of them, converged at the Sheep Gate in the northern wall of the city, to be paraded into the corrals and pens prepared for them in the temple courts.

But that was not the only procession on that particular 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. A walking procession of people waving palm branches and exclaiming "Hosanna!" ("Save!") accompanied and followed behind a man riding a donkey, a man the crowds identified as the prophet from Nazareth. Scripture seems to indicate and tradition confirms that this procession also passed through the Sheep Gate. Through this act the one riding that donkey, Jesus of Nazareth, was saying, in effect: "Your Passover lamb has arrived. I am He."

For the bulk of that week, from Monday through Thursday, priests and Levites, there in the temple courts, examined those thousands of Passover lambs, one by one, to make sure that each was free of any blemish or defect that would disqualify it from the sacrifice. The lambs had to be perfect (Exodus 12:5-6).

Isn't it significant that on Monday and Tuesday after Palm Sunday, Jesus also spent His time in the temple courtyards, teaching the people? There the chief priests and teachers of the law confronted Him, debated with Him, examined His teaching, and tested Him, trying to find any moral defect in Him. Not for a few minutes, but for two days they examined Him, but each day's examination provided the same results: they could find no crime or sin for which to condemn Him. He was spotless and without defect, truly the only man ever to live who was absolutely unblemished by sin, just like the Passover lambs.

Then, on Thursday evening at the Passover meal Jesus took the unleavened bread, broke it, gave it to His disciples, and said, "Take and eat. This is My body, which is for you" (Matthew 26:26; 1 Corinthians 11:24). *His* body?! Why, the only body to be eaten at the Passover meal was the body, the flesh, of the Passover lamb! Of course, the disciples were confused. Once again Jesus was indicating that He was the true Passover Lamb that would be sacrificed for them. All the other lambs were types, pointing to Him.

Although biblical scholars disagree on this point, some believe that John's gospel indicates that the sacrifice of the Passover lambs took place on the next day, Friday (cf. John 13:1; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42). If that is the case, then the necessary preparations for the sacrifice

itself would have begun on Friday morning, since the sacrifice itself would begin at 3:00 in the afternoon and last for only about two hours. Because thousands of lambs were to be sacrificed, the Levites (the priestly assistants) would begin tying up the lambs in the morning, oftentimes binding their legs together. That way the animals would be ready for the assembly-line-like slaughter.

Mark's gospel tells us that at 9:00 on that Friday morning Jesus was crucified (Mark 15:25). Like the sacrificial lambs, His arms and legs were bound to the beams of the cross, and His hands and feet were nailed to it. God's final and ultimate Passover Lamb was being readied for the slaughter.

After the priests and Levites had killed the lambs, they gave them to the people to take home and prepare the Passover meal. God had strictly instructed that the flesh of the lambs should be eaten neither raw nor boiled. Instead, their bodies were to be roasted over an intense fire (Exodus 12:9).

Throughout the Bible fire symbolizes God's judgment and wrath. The Scriptures describe hell in particular as a place of intense fire because hell is the ultimate judgment of God. When Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He was experiencing the fiery penalty of hell in every sinner's place. At the same time the priest's knife slit the first lamb's throat, the Son of God felt the weight of the sin of the world crushing Him.

Then at three o'clock Jesus said, "It is finished," bowed his head, and died (John 19:30). Indeed, it *was* finished. The sacrifice that replaced all other sacrifices was complete. All other sacrifices in the temple were superfluous, unnecessary. The Lamb of God had been slain, the sacrificial victim to which all the other sacrificed lambs had pointed. With His death the unblemished Son of God had made the final and total payment for sin.

Later, using mallets, Roman soldiers broke the legs of the crucifixion victims next to Jesus (in order to accelerate their deaths.) When they came to Jesus, however, seeing that He was already dead, the soldiers did not break His legs. The apostle John tells us why. God had stipulated that the Passover lamb's bones should not be broken in the process of the sacrifice (John 19:36; cf. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12) and Jesus, John is implying, is indeed *the* Passover Lamb. All of this took place, just as the prophet Isaiah had foretold many centuries before:

Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:4-7a).

When Isaiah says, "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6), he is referring to the priest's laying his hands upon the sacrificial lamb and confessing the sins of the people, transferring the sins of the people to the lamb. God the Father transferred our iniquity –

our obstinate, foolish, wandering, sheep-like ways – to Jesus, and it crushed Him. In the process His unblemished righteousness, His sinless-ness, has been transferred to us.

But let us say no more in the face of such a sacrifice. Who can understand such love?

You who think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great

Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate.

Mark the sacrifice appointed; See who bears the awful load;

It's the Word, [Lamb of God,] the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God.

Amen.