

### Redeemer: Lamb of God

Last week I began this Advent series of messages called "Redeemer." The One whose birth we celebrate at Christmas is the One who redeems us from the dark life that sin brings into our world. **Advent is our time to prepare ourselves to receive Christ as our Redeemer.** God has been preparing long before we arrived on the scene.

When Jesus embarked on the mission His heavenly Father had given Him, John the Baptist announced His mission saying: **Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, John 1:29.** Many people, when they hear the word "lamb" think gentle, helpless, friendly, and innocent. Compare that with the image from last week of the snake ... what comes to mind? Children instinctively love lambs while most people stay away from snakes. The two animals are about as far apart on the emotional scale as you can get.

But **when John the Baptist called Jesus the "Lamb of God" his followers immediately knew what he was talking about.** The lamb was and is a familiar biblical image. Following a thousand years of tradition, lambs were often sacrificed as an offering to God - and continued in Jesus' day at the Temple in Jerusalem. So, what did John the Baptist mean when he called Jesus the Lamb of God?

### I. Confrontation In Egypt

To understand the biblical picture of Jesus as a lamb we must go back in history about 35 centuries to ancient Egypt. There we find God's people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, held in bondage. For over 400 years they'd been slaves. (Read all about it in Genesis 46-50).

Finally, **God raised up a leader named Moses who took a message to Pharaoh: "Let my people go!"** Pharaoh refused. (Read about it in Exodus 1-12). So God sent 10 plagues on the Egyptians to persuade Pharaoh to let His people go. It was the 10th plague that did it and is remembered to this day. The 10th plague was when God sent the Angel of Death to destroy every first born in the land of Egypt. Before that night God gave the Israelite people instructions to sacrifice a lamb without blemish for a special meal, and to sprinkle the blood of that lamb on their doorposts and lintels. That night the Angel of Death came upon Egypt but *passed over* those Israelite houses where the blood of a lamb had been sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels. **It was the blood of the lamb that saved the people of God that night.** For 3500 years, and continuing to this day, the Jews have observed a Passover celebration as a solemn reminder of God's amazing deliverance of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt.

### II. The Ultimate Passover

God commanded the Jews to remember their salvation by celebrating the "Feast of Passover" every year (Exodus 12:42-49). Each Jewish household was to sacrifice a lamb without blemish each year during the Feast of Passover. This lamb was known as the Passover Lamb. So **when Jesus was called the Lamb of God, I believe those who heard it would immediately connect Jesus with the sacrifice that brings freedom and salvation.** In a sense, Jesus was the ultimate Passover lamb, sacrificed not just for the Jews but for all people. God's own son, the seed of a woman, sacrificed himself to free all people from the burden of sin. Let's look at the connections:

#### A. It Must Be A Lamb

Moses instructed the Israelites as God directed, **"Tell the whole community of Israel that ... each man is to take a lamb for his family and one for each household," Exodus 12:3.** It couldn't be a bull or a dove, which were sometimes used in other Old Testament sacrifices. God was very particular—it was to be a lamb and only a lamb.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he cried out, *Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*, John 1:29. Many understood what he meant. Christians knew what Paul meant when he wrote: *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us*, I Corinthians 5:7.

#### **B. It Must Be Without Blemish**

The Passover lamb was selected on the 10th day of the month but not sacrificed until the 14th day. This gave the Israelites time to carefully inspect their lambs to make sure it had no blemishes of any kind, as God instructed. They were not to offer a lame or inferior creature while keeping the best for themselves.

The apostle Peter speaks of Jesus as “... a lamb without blemish or defect,” 1 Peter 1:19. Christ entered Jerusalem at the beginning of the week and was crucified on Friday. This gave ample time for people to examine Him and His detractors to discredit Him. Jesus was brought before the hostile high priests of Israel but they could find no cause to put him to death so they trumped up false charges against him and accused him before the Roman Governor. After Pontius Pilate examined Jesus he said, “I find no fault in him” John 19:6. He was a man who had no sin of his own to atone for. Even his enemies had to concede that he was fit to be a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

#### **C. It Must Have No Broken Bones**

Exodus 12:46 specifies that when animals were chosen for the yearly Passover sacrifice, none of the bones were to be broken. You should know that it was the custom of the Romans to break the legs of those being crucified in order to hasten their death. But when Jesus was crucified the Roman soldiers did not break His legs because he was already dead (John 19:32-36). Verse 36 points out that this happened to fulfill the scripture that says, *The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken*. Psalm 34:19-20. Although the quoted verse happens to be Psalm 34:20, the ultimate reference goes back to Exodus 12.

#### **D. The Blood Must Be Sprinkled**

God instructed the Israelites that once the lamb had been slaughtered and the blood drained, the father must take a bunch of hyssop (a leafy bush), dip it in the blood, and smear the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe. *The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt*, Exodus 12:13. Try as they might to protect themselves, only the blood of the lamb could spare them from God’s judgment.

That’s why 1 Peter 1:2 says we are *chosen ... to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood*. Jesus’ blood saves but only when taken by faith. For those who reject the blood, the Lamb of God is of no avail to them. People may strive to do many things to lessen their condition as sinners, but only the blood of Jesus will do the job.

#### **E. The Meat Must Be Fully Consumed**

Not only was the blood shed and the meat roasted, but the family was to eat the meat together with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (a reminder of their days in Egypt). They were not allowed to keep the meat for later use. Any part not eaten must be burned. Thus the Israelites were reminded that their redemption came through the death of a substitute. By eating its meat, they signified their complete identification with the lamb who died for them.

Here’s what Jesus himself said, *I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you*, John 6:53. He wasn’t speaking of literal flesh and literal blood but of saving faith in Him. We are to take Christ into ourselves completely, wholly, absolutely, and without qualification – Holy Communion reminds of us of this.

### **III. The Lamb Today**

On the roof of a Catholic Church in Werden, Germany, there is a stone carving of a lamb. The story behind that carving is this: a workman was on the roof of this church when his safety rope

broke and he pitched headlong into the churchyard below. The yard was cluttered with huge stone blocks. Between two of the blocks a lamb was nibbling grass. The man fell on the lamb, crushing it to death, and breaking what would have been a fatal fall. The workman was not hurt seriously. In gratitude he carved a lamb out of a stone and placed it on the roof. It was his way of expressing his thanks to the dumb animal that had unknowingly saved his life.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, knowingly saved us from the eternally fatal fall from God's good creation. How much deeper must be our gratitude to him. **Willingly and lovingly Christ gave His life that we might live.** That is what John the Baptist is talking about when he calls out: *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."*

**1. Jesus Christ: God's Lamb** - In the Old Testament lambs were frequently sacrificed as a sin offering. Calling **Christ the Lamb** signifies that He **is sacrificed to reconcile sinful people to God.** The apostle Peter explains, *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed ... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect, 1 Peter 1:18-19.* St. Paul writes, *For Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed... 1 Corinthians 5:7.* In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, Christ is called *"the Lamb"* 30 times.... *"a Lamb looking as if it had been slain..."* Rev. 5:6. If you really believe that Jesus is the Lamb of God, then this will change the way you live; and you'll want to bring others to Him

**2. No Sacrifice, No Salvation** - **Hebrews 9:22** reminds us that, *... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.* A living lamb may be cute and cuddly, but unless the lamb dies, his blood does no good. Jesus knew his appointed destiny was to be the Lamb of God sacrificed for all. He went to the Cross willingly. By His blood our sins are forgiven, *by his wounds we are healed,* **Isaiah 53:5.**

**3. Without Faith Jesus Cannot Help You** - Suppose an Israelite had refused to sacrifice a lamb on that first Passover night. His firstborn would have died. Just being an Israelite could not save anyone on that fateful night. **It's not national origin that matters to God, but faith in God's appointed way of salvation.** You aren't saved by being a member at FUMC or any other church, or by attending regularly. When God looks down from heaven, the only thing that matters is that he sees the blood of the Lamb applied to the doorposts of your heart. If you refuse God's lamb, there is no other plan of salvation. *The blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin, 1 John 1:7.*

### **You Need The Lamb**

I need the Lamb. Everyone needs the Lamb. The Passover lamb was slaughtered annually, as a feast of remembrance for what God had done to free the Israelites from bondage. **Jesus the Lamb of God died once to free all from the bondage of sin.** No further sacrifice for sin is needed.

*Just as man is destined once to die and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him, Heb. 10:27-28.*

There's a plaque in our choir room that says, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." It all begins with you and me. We can get very passionate about changes "out there" which means making other people conform to our plan. But real change happens when people are transformed from the inside out, and only Jesus can make that happen.

**Jesus is the Lamb you need.** He is God's Lamb for your **sin.** He is also the Lamb your neighbor, coworker, school-mate, and fellow pew-sitter needs. If you know that the blood of the Lamb has freed you from bondage to sin and death, then let the joy of that truth shine through your living and don't be afraid to share it!

As we look forward to Christmas, let us look to the One of whom we say, **Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, John 1:29.**