

The Lamb of God

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Bible Verse: John 1:29
Preached on: Sunday, October 29, 2023

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Well, as we come to this marvelous chapter in John 1, what we are reading is at the start is about the ministry of John the Baptist, and God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ and in some ways, John the Baptist was a unique, great figure in all of biblical history. He stood at the hinge point between the Old and the New Testament. As we read, the prophet Isaiah predicted the ministry of John the Baptist some 700 years before it actually took place and said what his purpose would be, and as we read the words of John the Baptist in this chapter, he is self-conscious of the fact that he is appointed by God, anointed by God, and fulfilling a prophetic role in the entire work and action of redemption, in the mission of redemption.

And the Lord had a particular unique role for John the Baptist, and I like to picture it in the simplest of ways. Picture John walking into a dark room, walking into the darkness of Israel there in the first century as they had been encrusted with all kinds of Pharisaic notions about the law of God and what true faith was, and into that darkness, God shone a spectacular spotlight that had John in the middle of it and it drew attention from the people, from the nation, to John as he ministered. You can read about John's ministry elsewhere in Matthew 3 and more about the message that he preached and the counsel that he gave to those who came and said, "What shall we do?" Soldiers came and asked him and he spoke to tax collectors and what they should do and all of these things, and so he had a very prominent ministry. But what John did, and if I can mix metaphors and talk about things that are not physically possible, what John did and what his purpose was is that he grabbed that spotlight that was on him and rather than keeping it there, he said in John 3:30, speaking of Christ, he said, "He must increase and I must decrease." And so he took the spotlight and he shifted it away from himself and put it over onto the Lord Jesus Christ. That was his purpose, that was his ministry, and that, my friends, is what John was doing when everyone's attention was on him and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Now it's interesting that John says the Lamb of God. It's interesting because if you're not very familiar or even if you're new to Scripture, it might seem very odd to you. Why would you refer to Jesus as a lamb, and we're going to explain that, it had very specific connotations. But it's also interesting, both historically in the context of the first century and significant for our day, what it is that John was saying. You see, when John the Baptist came, he arrived at a nation that was expecting God to send them a conquering

Messiah. They were living under the domination of Rome and they wanted to be independent, they wanted to be free, they wanted to be free to serve God as they thought he needed to be served, and they had understood the Old Testament Scriptures to give them a picture that God was going to send someone who would bring deliverance and bring deliverance, let's say, in a political and military way to break the political domination of Rome over them and restore them to being a people of their own. They were expecting that. They didn't understand that in his first coming, Jesus wasn't coming to conquer like that at all; Jesus was coming first to prepare the way spiritually so that one day his people would be able to reign with him in a time that is still future to us. They were not ready spiritually to reign, they were not ready spiritually for a conquering Messiah, and they had no ability of their own, because they were dead in their trespasses and sins, they had no ability of their own to prepare themselves for that time. And that's why John said, "You have to repent, repent, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." You read that often in the ministry of John the Baptist. Well, beloved, and so when John comes and says, "Behold the Lamb of God," he is creating an entirely different picture than what the first century expectations were.

Now, pause for a moment and consider our own situation now. Now, as we look forward to Christ's return, we'll see in days to come, as we go through the book of Revelation at some point, I've been promising that for a long time, that we'll come and we'll see that Jesus Christ is going to return to earth as a conquering King of kings. That time is still yet to come, it's future to us today. But the problem, the spiritual problem, that is so quickly overlooked, even in the church, and I say this with profound sorrow in my heart, but I've been convinced of this for a very, very long time, many in the church are not spiritually prepared for the coming of Christ. When I say many in the church, many who gather and come to church and outwardly identify with the church, but still have cold, hard, unbelieving, unrepentant hearts and are in no different spiritual position. The advents of Christ are situated differently in our day than they were in the first century, but we still have people that are resistant to the authority of Christ, especially as it's expressed through his word, people that have no love for Christ, no love for his word, that aren't spiritually prepared, that have nothing of the Beatitudes in their character, poor in spirit, mourning over sin, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, peaceable, and suffering persecution for the sake of his name. I say this with all tenderness, beloved. I'm not at all trying to be polemical or confrontational here today but look at the Beatitudes and ask yourself whether that's the predominant trait that you see in people that claim to be Christians, and we have to be honest and say, it's not. It's sorrowful. People who outwardly profess the name of Christ lack the spiritual characteristics that he says always and exclusively belong to those who are in the kingdom of God.

It's the same spiritual condition for an audience as it was in the days of John the Baptist and this has been a great grief to my heart for many, many years now, and so I keep pointing that out and trust the Lord that one day one by one in hearts and, you know, perhaps one day they'll be as others who share in ministry, like-minded ministry with me as we say these things that there would be a crack from which there would be a birth of many souls coming to Christ, cold Christians confessing their sin and coming humbly before him, saying, "I'm tired of being the lukewarm Christian that's described in

Revelation 3. I don't want you to spit me out of your mouth, but I can see entirely why you would. I don't want to be like those at Ephesus who had lost their first love and simply be an argumentative doctrinaire without any real love for Christ." All of these things we have to take seriously. Scripture is filled with warnings against unbelief in letters that are written to the churches, that are spoken to people within the outwardly professing body of Christ. And so we look at Scripture, we see the marks of a true Christian, we look at the world around us, we look at the church around us and see, wow, this is not matching up with what Scripture describes and it calls us and it forces us and even me, you know, I don't mind telling you, as I said these things, I've looked at my own heart, I've had to consider my own condition and come to some measure of grips with my own lukewarm approach to living for Christ. None of us, none of us should be approaching this table with a boastful, proud spirit here today, but each one looking to himself, each one looking to see what God's word would say about our own hearts, about our own lives, and having contemplated that, that we would look out beyond ourselves to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and so we're trusting God to work that into our hearts here this morning as we consider these things together.

So with that sobering and yet hopeful look at things, let's consider what John meant when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Well, a lamb today, just like it was back then, simply a young sheep, and the lamb in the Old Testament was the principle, the main, the primary animal of sacrifice among the Jews of the Old Testament. They would slay lambs in accordance with the instructions of God, in order to present blood that would grant them access into his presence. We're going to see that as we go along, but just as a general picture, just as a general principle, before we enter into the text, I just want to say this to you, just by way of understanding. Those first century Jews, to whom John proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God," they knew from their Scriptures, they knew from their practice of religion, and they knew from key episodes in their national history, and they knew from key prophetic texts this principle, they knew the principle of a lamb being sacrificed to preserve the life of someone else from the judgment of God. Let me say that again, they knew the principle of a lamb being sacrificed to preserve the life of someone else from the judgment of God. A lamb was interposed between the people and judgment so that judgment did not fall upon them, and so what I want to do here in our first point for this morning, I want you to consider the lamb in the Old Testament. The lamb in the Old Testament, and when I say the lamb, what I'm talking about here is a literal lamb, not Christ as the lamb. What we want to do is we just want to quickly survey what the Bible says about a lamb in the Old Testament so that we can understand more fully what John meant when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God," because if you and I understand what John meant when he said "the Lamb of God," then we're going to immediately see what it means for you and me and for our souls.

So let's start by considering the lamb in the Old Testament and time doesn't allow us to really set the context like I would like to so I'm going to rely on the fact that you know certain things about Old Testament history. When God was about to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt, and it was not planned out, Matt alluded to this in his opening when he talked about God delivering his people by his power, we did not coordinate that

at all. We never do. When God was about to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt, this principle came into play and I want you to turn to the book of Exodus 12 with me. Exodus 12. You will remember that God sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh. They performed numerous signs in Pharaoh's presence. God sent nine different plagues upon Egypt to bring pressure upon Pharaoh to let his people go. Pharaoh said, "No, no. Okay, you can go. No, just kidding. No. Yes, you can go. No," and it was all of this back and forth vacillation and God building expectation as the severity of the plagues continued to grow. Well, now it was time for the climactic event. It was time for the 10th plague and in Exodus 12, beginning in verse 1, we read this, "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 'This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.'" Drop down to verse 5, "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it."

Now, beloved, remember what's happening here, remember that God is about to deliver the entire household, all of that generation of Israelites numbering hundreds of thousands, if not more. He's about to deliver them from the greatest nation that existed on earth at that day and bring them out from under that domination by his own power and deliver them ultimately to a land that would be their own where they could become a nation of their own. And this is a most critical episode and moment in the history of the people, and at that most historic, crucial, transitional moment where the power of God was going to be uniquely displayed, a lamb is at the center of it. That's what we need to keep in mind. And with this slain lamb, God gave them instruction on what they were to do. We read in verse 12 and 13, there in Exodus 12, God says, "I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments," there's that word again, "I am the LORD. 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 no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt." Drop down to verse 23, again Exodus 12. "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 will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you." So they slay this lamb, they take the blood and they sort of paint it on the door frame and that blood was a visual representation of them being marked out and separated from the heathen Egyptians around them so that, this is the purpose clause in what I'm saying, it's so important, so that the judgment about to strike the Egyptians, the people and their animals and every firstborn would soon die by the stroke of judgment from the hand of God, that judgment would not fall on those that had the blood applied to the doorframe of their homes and you can read about how all of that took place as you go along.

Now, that wasn't all. As God moved in and gave them instructions for their worship to follow in the Mosaic economy, he required a lamb as the daily sacrifice for Jews to meet

him in worship. So in Exodus 29, if you will turn there with me. Exodus 29. As you're turning there, let me just say this. I realize we're being rather slow and methodical in the development of the theme here. That's necessary and it's by, you know, I guess by my choice. Think about it this way. If you've ever flown, you know, inter-continently, you know, you've got to get on a big, big plane in order to get over the ocean. When the plane is taking off, it lumbers down the runway in what is seemingly a very slow and interminable process as it's picking up the necessary speed in order to lift off. That slow process is essential to the successful trip in the nature of aeronautical engineering, which I don't claim to know anything about. A message like this is somewhat like that plane lumbering down the runway. It takes a while to get off, but once you do, you can go far, far places when you understand these things and we need to understand these things carefully, we need to take our time with them so that we appreciate something of the significance of what it means that Jesus is the Lamb of God. So we're not going to rush through it because this is good for our souls to consider.

Exodus 29, beginning in verse 38. Again, what we're seeing here is the principle of a lamb being sacrificed in the context of daily worship in Israel. Verses 38 and 39, God tells the people through Moses, "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight." Now, the picture here, and this is a picture, this kind of sacrificial system was pointing forward to Christ all along. The picture is that the lamb was a symbol of innocence. The lamb had done nothing wrong. It was an unblemished animal physically, and lambs were, I don't know much about sheep and lambs, but they're animals that are not aggressive, at least in their young age, and so they were a symbol of innocence and the lamb was slain in substitution, that innocent, harmless lamb was slain as a substitute for those who were guilty so that the guilty could approach God. The gap, the chasm between holy God and sinful man needed a bridge of blood built so that the guilty could approach God. And done on a daily basis, you can only imagine how deeply ingrained this was on the collective consciousness. Look at verse 41 of Exodus 29. Again as the plane is lumbering down the runway picking up speed, "The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD. It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory." You want to meet with me, there will be the blood of a lamb that's necessary to meet with God. Okay, that picture's pretty clear.

Now, as we transition away from the literal lamb, as we're still considering the lamb in the Old Testament, as revelation continued to unfold, as there was a progress in revelation, God started with the picture with the lamb, literal lambs being slain. Then he moved to prophecies, you can be turning to Isaiah 53 as I finish what I'm about to say. He turned to prophecies that more specifically spoke about the Messiah, and then later he brought the Messiah himself. God spoke, you know, think about as we speak to little children, little toddlers, and we speak to them somewhat in baby language as they're learning to develop their skills and their understanding, and then they grow and we can

address them a little bit more directly, but when they're adults we speak in an entirely different language because they have developed to a point where they are able to engage in adult conversation. Well, somewhat in a faint picture like this, God teaches his people, "There's got to be bloodshed in order to meet with me," and he used an animal. Then he starts to transition into the so-called teenage years, I'm just speaking metaphorically here, and he starts to speak about what to expect from the coming Messiah, and then the Messiah comes and we have the adult manifestations, as it were, of Christ, and then the epistles are given after that to help us explain and understand even more the significance on the other side of the cross. There's a progress in revelation. It wasn't all dumped out at once because just like a toddler is not developed enough to talk about retirement plans and work ethic and all of that, so in the same way, these often unconverted Jews at the time were learning the ABCs of how to approach a holy God, how to approach the God who had set them apart. They were learning the ABCs, and then when time came, they could take the doctorate course in Christ, so to speak.

So there's this progress that's going to take place as you go to Isaiah 53 and I think you're already there, I'm just catching up with you here in my pulpit Bible. Isaiah, the prophet, he pictured Christ, the Christ to come, as a lamb slain for sinners. So by this point, by the time Isaiah's making this prophecy, you've got maybe 800 years of the sacrificial process being established in the mind of Israel. Now Isaiah, 700 years before Christ, some 800 years, 7-800 years after Moses, gives this passage which we know so well. Isaiah 53:4-7. He says, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray," Here it's using a different, it's using sheep not as a sacrifice but as a picture of an animal that strays away. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid the iniquity of us all on him." Then verse 7, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." Isaiah says there's a Messiah coming, he'll be a sin offering, he'll be like a lamb. Verse 11, Isaiah 53, "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." Here is the focal point upon which sinners can be counted and accepted as righteous by God is by this coming Messiah who will be like a lamb, who will have the sins of them placed upon him. He will be stricken. He will shed his blood as a penal substitute sacrifice on their behalf so that everyone that looks to that crucified Messiah could avoid death in the judgment of God, so that the judgment of God would pass over those who look to this Messiah for their deliverance and for their righteousness, so that those who look to the Messiah could find the one and only meeting place with God. There's continuity in the picture. There's continuity in the explanation. The Lamb substitute the blood helping God and the basis upon which God passes over his people when he is judging others, the lamb being the meeting place.

Now beloved, understand that the written revelation in Scripture, their national history and their deliverance from Egypt, the daily practice of worship at the tabernacle and then

the temple, all of this going on for 1,500 years, ingraining the principles we're talking about here and stamping them deeply upon the collective consciousness of the nation. Think about it this way. If I mention Abraham Lincoln to you, here in America at least, there's an instant association that you make with that. Assassinated at the end of the Civil War. Whether you like Lincoln or some of you in the South don't like Lincoln, that ain't my point. We're not talking about Abraham Lincoln here. We're simply making a point that there are points of reference in national history that we all have some kind of grasp on and Lincoln was assassinated just 150 years ago. That's not long. The 1,500 years of Israel history, 10 times as long, a daily reminder with the lamb, and if you think about American history, 250 years since the founding of our country, give or take, 1,500 years from Moses and the deliverance from Egypt to the time of Christ, six times as long as the national history of the United States of America as we're speaking today and we think that's a long time and a glorious history of our country. Well, multiply it by six to greater exclusiveness and you realize that this principle of the lamb was just so embedded in their mind that it was as sure a principle as the principle of gravity operating around us today. They knew what a lamb was. They had associations that they made for it. That's what the Old Testament prepared the way for.

Let's go to our second point this morning. Now as the plane starts to take off, we start to go out over the ocean, we realize we're ascending over something great and vast that makes us seem small and tiny by comparison. Point number two, Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. Point number one, the lamb in the Old Testament. Point number two, Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. With all of that foundation that we've laid here this morning, understand this, actually, let's approach it this way. Let me just remind you, we read it earlier, John 1:29. John 1:29. The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And in verse 36, he said it the next day. He looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." And so this man who by outward appearances, speaking of Jesus, who by outward appearances looked like any other man, John the Baptist, who was obviously sent by God as shown by his powerful preaching and the response to it, John points to this otherwise inconspicuous one and says, "That's the Lamb of God." And then the light bulbs just start popping and going off in the minds of people. What could that possibly... the lamb means a substitute sacrifice slain for guilty sinners so they can avoid the judgment of God and John transfers that association over to the person that's walking in their midst. It's really wonderful to read this and to have the help of the Holy Spirit to understand something of the significance of it as we walk by faith 2,000 years later. For just a moment, I wish there was a way to time travel and to be there with our understanding in the moment and watch, see what happens, see the faces as people look at it. John says, "There goes Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Now, in light of everything that we've seen, the Passover event, the daily sacrifice, the prophetic picture in Isaiah 53, you can read commentaries on this passage and you'll find that scholars will quibble with one another over exactly what John had in mind. Was he referring to the Passover in Exodus? Was he referring to the daily sacrifice? Was he referring to Isaiah 53? And your eyes can glaze over as they talk about these things. Here's what you and I should be able to understand clearly. The overall concept that John

is describing and the metaphor that he's using, it's crystal clear. He is figuratively referring to Jesus Christ as a lamb and as a lamb in that context of these people, he is saying, "This one here is the meeting place with God. This one here, that one's blood will be shed in substitution for sinners like you. That blood applied to a soul will enable that soul to escape the judgment that God's going to bring on everyone else, as shown in the final plague in Egypt." Oh beloved, Christ the Lamb, Christ the Lamb. John's saying three years before the event, in calling him the Lamb, he's saying, "That one there is going to be slain so that the judgment of God will pass over anyone who has that blood applied to them." Christ the Lamb would bear their sins in his coming death. Christ the innocent lamb would be slain in the place of sinners.

In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul says that Christ our Passover has been sacrificed, Christ in our place as our substitute, and there's two things that we should not let slip away from our understanding here, two things that we need to have wedded side by side as we consider Christ the Lamb. One is to remember, as we said earlier, the preeminent excellency of this person, the preeminent firstborn one of the entire universe, the Creator of the universe through whom all things were made as you read earlier in John 1. All things were made through him. The one who created all things and all things made through him, that one would be the Lamb of God. This one who as you read in his subsequent life of preeminent moral excellence, of preeminent wisdom, of preeminent power over demons, over nature, over sin, over death, that preeminent one is the one who's going to be the lamb slain, bloodshed, and all of this. This is the majesty of the incarnation, God becoming human flesh, two natures in one person, and yet not just, not just two natures in one person, but a person of preeminent greatness, infinite eternal essence to be slain for guilty sinners like you and me. Behold the Lamb of God, beloved. Behold the wisdom of God. Behold the power of God. Behold the gospel of God in the things that we are saying here. Behold the opportunity we have to remember this in just a few moments and recognize and understand afresh why we don't take communion lightly. We're talking about preeminent things throughout all of biblical history, the core of redemption of sinners, the core of the glory of Christ. So well do we warn people not to take it lightly. Well do we take time to remember our dear Lord.

Turn to the book of 1 Peter 1. And as you're turning there, well do we come by faith, well do we come humbly, well do we come not protesting any works or righteousness of our own, but come as bankrupt, poor, confessing, mourning sinners grateful that God has provided a lamb by which we could meet him and escape the judgment that will fall on the world. Peter, in 1 Peter 1, picks up on this imagery of the lamb as well. In 1 Peter 1:17, he says, "if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile." Conduct yourselves with fear, not with superficial emotion, not with some kind of mindless response to pulsating music and calling that worship. Consider who you address as Father and respond in the fullness of your life reaction with fear throughout the time of your exile, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers." How did you come to Christ? How were you delivered? How were you saved from your sins, Peter is saying. That's the point that he's making. It wasn't "with perishable things such as silver or gold." There was nothing that you could present. You

couldn't buy your salvation with Fort Knox. You couldn't buy your salvation with a thousand earths to give. In the words of Isaac Watts, if the whole realm of nature was yours, that wouldn't be a sufficient gift to give to God to forgive your guilt and to credit you with the righteousness of Jesus Christ so that you could abide with him throughout all of eternity. None of it's enough. Nothing earthly could accomplish this. And even if there was a gift, I'm speaking as a fool, as a madman, even if there was a gift that we could somehow give to God that would be sufficient for eternal life, there's not, but let's just play a game of pretend, even if there was, your guilty hands would defile it before it could be presented to him. If you tried to pick it up and present it to him, your own guilty hands would defile it. Nothing. It's futile. Our desires, our efforts to save ourselves are futile. Gold and silver cannot purchase a gift like this.

So how was it that we can be redeemed then if it's nothing that we can do? Verse 19, 1 Peter 1. You weren't ransomed with silver or gold, but there was one way, it was with "the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him," the meeting place with God, through that meeting place with God you "are believers in God, who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." Peter says, "You were redeemed because an innocent lamb lay down his life. The blood shed at that cross satisfied the demands of God's justice against all of your iniquity."

You see, beloved, let's step back and remember what we were like before Christ before we come to the table, and those of you who are not Christians, a thought that grieves my heart because I would have everybody in this room know Christ. If you're not a Christian, what I'm about to say describes you right now. Sin leaves us separated from God and under condemnation. Isaiah 59 says, your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. Separated, hidden, he does not hear. Elsewhere in the Psalms it says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." And we all have sin in our hearts. What are we to do? Ezekiel 18, "The soul who sins will die." Into that hopeless condition steps the Lamb of God whom we are to behold. Christ bore the penalty that God's justice demands from guilty sinners. He bore the penalty that we could not pay ourselves. Listen to these Scriptures. 2 Corinthians 5, "He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him." 1 Peter 2, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross." 1 Peter 3, "Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God."

Beloved, the deplorable nature of theology is always trying to come up with ways that undermine the blood sacrifice of Christ and what Scripture ascribes the significance of it so that people want to deny the penalty-bearing nature of Christ. They'll say ridiculous blasphemous things like, "You know, that's cosmic child abuse. The Father's abusing his Son." And other foolish things like that are really unmentionable, not fit to be mentioned. I say that just to set the context here. You need a couple of theological terms in your mind as you think about Christ. The death of Christ was penal, p-e-n-a-l. It was penal in the sense that as he died, he was paying the penalty of sin for his people. And in addition

to that, the death of Christ was substitutionary, meaning that he died in the place of his people. He was the substitute. You and I could not bear an eternal penalty that our sins against an eternal God demanded. Sin against eternal God, against the eternal law of an eternal God demands an eternal penalty and we, with our finite resources, we can't pay it. And those that die unforgiven will spend eternity trying to pay a debt that can never be paid. They'll never escape from the judgment because the penalty is endless. The worm does not die. The fire is not quenched. But behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Behold the Lamb that God himself provided, that Christ voluntarily accepted and made his own role.

Beloved, it was with the greatest of condescension of Christ by which we can be saved. Philippians 2 says that he was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. The fullness of everything that God requires from man was fulfilled to perfection in the life and death of Jesus Christ and he offers himself now in his resurrected power through his word, he offers himself to everyone who will believe and says, "All that is mine, the perfection of my righteousness, the satisfaction that my death rendered to the law of God, all of that can be yours if you just behold him." Behold him in a repentant spirit. Behold him in a humble spirit. Behold him and receive him. But my friend, understand that just like the children of Israel in the days of Egypt, that blood of his must be applied to your soul or you will be eternally lost. But as we remember at the Table here this morning, with that blood applied, here we are, the lukewarm Christians who have lost their first love, here we are those that have wandered aimlessly, lost, guilty, and yet to realize that right before you by the Spirit of God testifying to your heart, right before you is a lamb that you can lay hold of that satisfies all of that debt and takes it away forever. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Beloved, if you behold him, grab him, embrace him. Never let him go. Receive him and rest in him as your own.

Charles Spurgeon said this, he said, "God from all eternity appointed the Lord Jesus to be the great sacrifice for sin. When we rely upon Jesus Christ to save us, we trust in the one whom God has appointed to save his people. If, as a poor, guilty sinner, I leave my sin upon Christ, the Lamb of God, I leave it where God has bid me to cast it. I rest in a sacrifice which God himself ordained of old to be the sacrifice for sin." Spurgeon goes on, "O soul, there can be no question that if you come to the Father in the way in which he himself appoints, you come acceptably. God's appointment is the guarantee of the acceptance of everyone that believes in Jesus." If you've done any reading about the ministry of Charles Spurgeon, you may know that there is a famous way that the Lord used him and this phrase, "Behold the Lamb of God," that I commend to you for consideration of your own soul. Prior to the days of sound amplification, Spurgeon was in a large auditorium on the day before a major speaking event where over 20,000 people were expected to attend. So he was doing a sound check in this great auditorium and the place was empty, or so it seemed, and they, whoever was working with Spurgeon, you know, you do a sound check and nine times out of ten, ninety-nine out of a hundred today, people say, "Testing, one, two, three, testing, one, two, three." Not Spurgeon. Spurgeon stood on that great platform and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." For all he knew, he was speaking to an empty room. What he didn't know was that there was a worker who had no idea of what the occasion was, who

heard Spurgeon say the simplicity of those words, and those words, "Behold, the Lamb of God," convicted him, convicted his soul. He put down his tools. He went home. He wrestled with God and came to saving faith in response to the simple invitation, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Beloved, beware of who you listen to that want to make Christianity complicated and about social matters and everything that you've got to do. Understand that the beginning premise of everything is that you as a guilty sinner would understand the principle of a blood sacrifice that the eternal Son of God is the one who laid it down and offers you to come and bids you "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." I call on you, everyone, to behold him today. I call on you, everyone, to recognize the greatness of the gift that is right before you and the ease of the invitation which is offered to you to behold him and come. In one sense, it's easy. In another sense, it means humbling yourself, beholding him and saying, "I can't save myself, I need you to save me." It means a willingness to turn from your sin and to behold this Lamb of God who is the Lord of God to rule over you, to receive him, to rest in him. But what alternative is there? Would you cling to your sin? Would you cling to yourself? Reject the blood? And say, "No, I don't want that blood applied to me. I think what I want is I want to go with the world and join in the judgment that it's going to face." What kind of fool would reason like that in his heart? What kind of fool would reject Christ in light of the consequences? Even more, what fool would look at the eternal blessed Son of God offered to him in love and walk away? That wouldn't be any of you, would it?

Christian, if you've beheld the Lamb of God, you've embraced him, as we come to the Table, rejoice, be at peace, be at rest, be strengthened, be emboldened, be encouraged. We have this Table because that Lamb of God loved you and gave himself up for you. We have this Table because that Lamb of God keeps you. We have that Table because that Lamb of God says, "I'll never drink the fruit of this kingdom until I'm with you in the kingdom." That's how much he loves us. That's how full the salvation is that we have in him. It's why we come with a reverent celebration of this Table here today.

Bow with me in prayer. Those of us that know Christ have an opportunity to take these elements, to be strengthened in our contemplation of faith of our dear Lord. Jesus Christ indeed, my brothers and sisters in Christ, he indeed poured out his blood to purchase salvation for us, and we gratefully remember the Lord who saved us from sin. You may be visiting here as a Christian. We invite you to join us in the Table if you are not holding on to any unconfessed sin. But if you're not a Christian, please pass the elements. Don't pretend to participate in a remembrance of a Lord that you have not received. And if you're a Christian defiantly holding on to sin and indifference and all of that, and you're not willing to repent as the elements come to you, you need to pass these elements by as well. We ask you not to profane the Lord's Table if you are consciously holding on to any sin in your life. Don't pretend to share in Christ if you are disobedient.

Father, give us grace. to receive this time well. Thank you for the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who takes away the sin of everyone who believes in him, and

those of us that are Christians can say individually, the Lamb of God who took away my sin. Hallelujah, what a Savior.

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