

Behold the Lamb of God!

Call to Worship: Isaiah 53

1st Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:10-2:5

2nd Scripture: John 1:19-34

Introduction

That greatest of all prophets, John the Baptist, had been given a sign from God, which would indicate to him who the Messiah was to be. We can imagine that, as John, the Forerunner to the Messiah, had ministered to and baptized multitudes of people, he probably carefully and eagerly looked on with great anticipation, longing to see the appearance of that sign. And then, as this one ordinary looking Jewish Man came forward, seeking John's baptism, suddenly the Spirit of God had descended like a dove upon the head of this Jesus of Nazareth, providing the sign, assuring John that this was the One! What an amazing moment for John to behold! His heart must have beat out of his chest, his eyes must have widened greatly, and his soul must have been overcome with great joy and awe, as he realized he was in the presence of such divine greatness!

"Lord, you want to be baptized by me? But no, I should be baptized by you! For I am not even worthy to loose the strap of your sandal." "Permit it for now, John. For, I must fulfill all righteousness." Following this, John all the more begins to make known the official arrival and anointing of the Christ, to His disciples. "Friends, you think I am some big deal, but no, I only baptize you with water. There is One among you who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And although He has appeared after me, He is actually before me, and therefore, far greater than me." And when Jesus appears again before John, in the presence of John's disciples, John then points Him out to them, so that, they would now start following Him, who was the Christ.

But, John provides his disciples with no small introduction to the Christ. As he looks and gazes upon Israel's (and the whole world's) only hope, he points, as it were, in His direction and he says these profound words, "Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" And no more profound, glorious, graphic and pregnant words could have been stated to

describe this Jesus! Including this morning, I have two final messages to leave with you, my brethren, before my family and I take our leave, and we all begin a new chapter in our walk with the Lord. For this first of the two, I want us simply to open up and ponder these words of the baptist, which he used to identify the Messiah in the presence of his disciples, especially because I believe there is no more attacked message in and outside of the church, and yet, there is no more precious and valuable message inside and outside of the church.

I. Behold!

There's a deep sense of excitement in John's heart here, isn't there? And how could it be otherwise? John knows who the long awaited Christ is! And He is here right in front of him. Maybe there is a rare occasion where you were amongst friends, and you saw a famous musician, athlete or actor/actress at some location, and you said, "Look, it's so-and-so!" And there is a sense of awe that overwhelms you, as you see someone famous right in front of you. Well, what happens when you see the Anointed of God? The long-awaited Messiah, who was promised thousands of years ago, to come and to redeem man from the utter mess and disaster that he has created, and which has separated him from the living God.

And so, John says, "Behold! Look! Stop and see!" "Whatever you are conversing about; whatever thoughts are presently filling your mind; whatever presently has your attention and focus, lay it aside and look right there! Behold! It is Him, the One I have been talking about!" Indeed, a few verses later, we are told that John said the same thing again, in the presence of two of his disciples. In verses 35-36, we are told, "Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Now, one of these disciples was Andrew. And as Andrew had spent time with Jesus, he was bitten by the contagion of John the Baptist, compelling him then to go and tell his brother, Peter. In verses 40-42, we are told, "One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

And this contagion continues to travel on, biting others. It bites Philip, who runs to tell Nathaniel. We are told in verses 43-45, "The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and

He found Philip and said to him, “Follow Me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

You see, brethren, after Jesus was revealed as the Christ to John the Baptist, there began to be a contagious spread of excitement, where disciples would go to tell others, who would then become disciples who would tell others...etc. This was the Coming One, and they had to get the news out!

And by way of application for a moment, brethren, before we hone in on the specific role and mission of this Messiah, let me ask you this morning, “Do you still have that same excitement in your heart, concerning the Christ whom you have come to know by faith?” Early on in our Christian walk, it was there, wasn’t it? But, what often happens along the way, as we trek the difficult and trial-some journey to glory? We can grow weary, or cold, or lethargic, or we can get swept back into the things of this world. There always is, and there always will be, something vying for our hearts, seeking to wrest our gaze away from Christ! Because when it is fixed on Christ, we are deadly, powerful weapons in the hands of our God! And the enemy knows this! Oh, brethren, we must realize that if we have grown cold, it’s not because Christ has changed, or has become less glorious, or has accomplished something less than what has grabbed our souls from the beginning. We have simply failed to nurture, cultivate and fan the flame of that original excitement! The problem is with us! The glory is still the same, the Christ is still the Son of God who redeems us; the blessings are still beyond comprehension, but we have allowed our minds to focus on the wind and the waves that surround us. And taking our eyes off of Christ, we have begun to sink!

But, we can draw back, can’t we? Cannot the Lord restore the years which the locusts have eaten away? Can we not stop, and behold again, and draw from the glory of the Lamb of God, all that once compelled us to forget all else, and to tell others that we have found the Savior? And so, John bids us, as it were: Stop, slow down, pull back from the tyranny of the urgent and the whirlwind of life, and “Behold! Get your focus back where it needs to be! Lay aside all idols and worries, and look there, in the Word of God... Behold Him!

... But, behold who?

II. Behold the Lamb of God!

Behold the Lamb of God! What a profound, graphic picture this language would have painted for the Jews. Those of us who have been studying the Book of Leviticus, have gotten at least a small taste of the implications here, have we not?

What is this label which John uses to identify with the Christ? A lamb??? Why a lamb? Oh, the Jew would have known so well what this meant. Vivid thoughts of innocence and cleanliness and perfection would have swum through their minds, leading into gross and horrific dismemberment and bloodshed! The purest and the best of their lambs were to be set apart for sacrifice. The whitest and purest, without defect, were to be reared for a very short time, only to be brutally hacked to pieces and burnt up for their own sins. The Jews knew this so well. They knew very well what John was saying here. They could easily envision how many times they had travelled to the temple with the best of their flocks, where they themselves were to slit the throat of these gentle, innocent creatures. And they were to hack their limbs off, and they were to skin them, and they were to separate their parts in accordance with the offering that was being made. And the priest would take the blood that was drained, and the parts that were to be offered to God, and they would pour that fresh blood onto the horns of the altar, and they would burn those fresh, young organs on the grate of the altar, all as a means of atoning for the sins of the owner and his family.

And then, there was the Paschal Lamb; that lamb that was to be eaten once a year for the whole family, on the Passover. It was that glorious picture of the redemption which God had brought about for His people, when He brought them out of Egypt. Then, they had brushed the blood of the lamb on the door posts of their houses, so that, the angel of death would spare their firstborn. And they would eat of the same lamb which was to be roasted in fire. Perpetually, for the generations that followed, they were to celebrate this glorious redemption, with sacrifices and with the eating of the Paschal Lamb, who was to be identified with the atonement that brought about their redemption.

These Lambs; these bloody sacrifices, were that to which John was pointing, by referring to Jesus as “the Lamb.” But even more so, John also distinguishes this particular Lamb from all

of the others, by referring to Him as the Lamb *of God*. This was a special Lamb; a Lamb to which all of the other animal lambs, merely pointed, as shadows. This was THE Lamb of God!

By identifying Him as such, John was indicating that this Lamb would accomplish something that all of the other lambs, individually and combined, could never accomplish. This Lamb was likewise, to be a bloody, mangled sacrifice, but His accomplishment would be far greater in its scope, duration and worth. This was God's very specific, anointed Lamb, chosen unto a specific task, which no literal animal lamb could accomplish.

Now, before we address this specific task, brethren, let us pause for a few moments, to consider another brief application here. The Son of God came down from heaven, was birthed through the womb of a woman (whom he had created), and took on flesh, and John the Baptist identifies Him with a sacrificial lamb. Though wiser than Solomon, He is not identified by His wisdom; though mightier than Samson, He is not identified by His strength; though a greater leader than Moses, He is not identified by His leadership abilities; though militarily much more capable than David, He is not identified by His military prowess. No, He is identified first and foremost, by John, as God's sacrificial Lamb. What a profound paradox? Our hero comes not with a cape, huge muscles and all kinds of super powers. He comes as a defenseless lamb, ready to deliver Himself over to His enemies, to be brutally beaten, whipped, crucified, and sacrificed. Why? Because that is the kind of Savior we needed, brethren! Because our *greatest* enemy is not some barbaric, sword wielding, towering threat, who resides outside of us. Our greatest enemy takes up his residence inside of us. Our greatest enemy is our own sin; our greatest enemy is us. And Jesus came as a Lamb to redeem us from ourselves, and from our curse, which has put an indelible, immovable wedge between us and our God! We don't need an Iron Man, or a Hulk, or a Captain America or a Spider-Man, to deliver us from space aliens or some giant demi-god with an all powerful gauntlet. We need God's Lamb (a Lamb worthy in the sight of God), to deliver us from the penalty and power of *our own sin!* In real life, we are the bad guys who need to be delivered from our own sinful and wretched hearts, because our God and Creator, somehow, still loves us. It's always good to look upon the big screen and to see the innocent damsel in distress being rescued by her brave and fighting hero. But, that's not reality. The Lamb of God delivers Himself over, so that, we can be rescued from the horror and wretchedness

that is us, only to be given a new heart that desires to know, love and serve the Creator whom we naturally hate. And the Lamb does this of His own accord, because if we are honest, in ourselves, we would never have wanted it. We would have told Him to go back home, while we happily clung to our sins and lusts. Such is the natural hardness of our fallen hearts.

III. Behold the Lamb of God *Who Takes Away the Sin of the World!*

We have stopped in the busyness of life to behold! We have stopped in the busyness of life to behold One whom John identifies as a Lamb; God's Lamb. And finally, we will now stop to consider further the very mission of this Lamb, which was to take away the sin of the world!

All of those lambs that were sacrificed by the people of God, ultimately, could not remove the sins of Israel or even the sins of the individuals who offered them. They were mere coverings, for a time, which looked to the real sacrifice (God's Lamb), who alone could actually remove sin, and that, forever, and once for all time. But, here we see, as well, something so profound in John's proclamation here. This particular Lamb, who alone could actually *take away* sin, would be one, whose offering would reach not simply to the borders of Israel, but even to the borders of the entire world!

This sacrificial Lamb of God, whom John beheld, and to whom John had pointed his disciples, would actually, legally pay for, and remove all of the sins that had infected a people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, across the entire world, and that, for all times! In other words, this Messiah; this Lamb, has everything to do with the eternal destination of every human being who has ever lived and walked on this earth! Can you even imagine a more important Person than this? Let me put it this way. Our relationship to this Christ (or not) is determinative for where every last one of us will spend our eternity!

We only have one Creator, and He is our eternal God. He is the only One who inhabits eternity, having no beginning and no end. Everything that exists in this creation, and in any creation that ever exists, finds its origin in this God, who has created all things for His glory! Everything that has ever existed, presently exists, and will ever exist, exists in, by, through and for Him! And you and I exist today; all of us exist today by and for God. Now, you might say, "Well why then do most in the world deny this God, serving other gods or proclaiming to serve

no god at all?" Friends, that is because we are all born alienated/separated from our God! Can you imagine anything more terrible than that? We are born in so marvelous a creation; we possess the wondrous treasure of life, only to be naturally under the condemnation of our holy and righteous and eternal God! We are fallen, spiritually dead, and blind to the things of God. And we spend our entire lives trying to fulfill ourselves with material things; with created things, rather than the Creator Himself, because of this. But, it is a dead end. None of these things ultimately satisfy, and we will all have to stand before God, beyond death's door (which is not that far ahead for any of us) to give an account to God.

By nature, we are all sinners, bound for eternal hell, because we are under the just condemnation and judgment of God because of our sins. Now, you may deny this, but it is true nonetheless. You may say, "Well that seems like some fairytale." But it's not. It's no more of a fairytale than your existence. You ever stop and think of the fact that you exist in a world where all kinds of amazing things exist? And you even have a deep-seated understanding of morality written on your heart, even if you choose to shun it? Doesn't conscious existence itself seem like a fairytale, with feelings, and tastes, and sight, and knowledge, and wisdom and love...etc? But, we are all right here. And we are here because our God, who is Spirit, has created us. But, because we love our sin; because we are trapped in a vault of seeking unfulfilling lusts, we deny this God and turn away from Him; indeed, we replace Him with things that could never ultimately satisfy us. We are sinners, and that is why Jesus came! That is why He came as "God's Lamb," to rescue us from our sins.

You all know that we are dying. That much is so obvious, isn't it? Isn't it amazing that we are willing to live this life with so little concern for death, when it is reaching out to each and every one of us, at this very moment. Whatever you are enjoying is not going to last. It will fade, even as your life fades. And you will stand before God! And your sins will damn you to hell, unless you embrace God's offering; God's Lamb, who alone, takes away the sin of the world! Behold! Look to Christ! Look to the Lamb! Cry out to Him for mercy and for salvation! Don't you see what grabbed ahold of John's heart here? The Redeemer of mankind had come into this world, and has offered Himself as a sacrifice on behalf of sinners, so that, we could be reconciled to God forever. And He doesn't merely cover sin. He actually, legally takes

it away, because He paid for it, through His own death. And He was raised from the dead three days later, to affirm this!

IV. Concluding Thoughts

Now brethren, as a final exhortation, I plead with you to fix your eyes and hearts fervently on the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ! Drink from the sweet well of fellowship with Him, daily, in His Word. Ponder the deep and inexplorable love that God has for you, in Christ. Get into the heart of that love, and ponder the fact that you are the object of such unsearchable love. Crack away the shell that would lead you to ever think that there is anything naturally good in you, which would warrant that love. God loved you while you were yet at your worst, knowing full well what you are by nature; knowing every corrupt flaw in you, when you wanted nothing whatsoever to do with Him. Get underneath that shell. And then, strip away the film that would lead you to think that God, in some way, gains, by loving you. God doesn't need you, or me, or any of us. That's just a fact. Is He glorified? Yes. But, He doesn't need us. And so, cut away the shell, peel away the film, and get right down to the core; to the core of realizing that there are no strings attached to God's love for you, at all. God has set His love upon you, because He chose and was delighted to make you an object of His rich grace! It's right there; it's grasping that reality beyond the mere words, and actually experiencing a sense of that reality, which will soften every hard place within your heart, compelling you to cast your entire life into the service of God and Christ! It's there that every idol and worldly hindrance will be dissolved, compelling you, not only to behold the Lamb of God afresh, but also, to go and tell Peter and Nathaniel and all who cross your path, this great and glorious news!

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! There is no more important message than this. And there is no greater threat to the church than to emphasize anything and everything else above this message. If it's not a unilateral emphasis on the importance of the family, it's a unilateral emphasis on the importance of combatting abortion. If it's not a unilateral emphasis on the importance of combatting abortion, it's a unilateral emphasis on overcoming poverty. If it's not a unilateral emphasis on overcoming poverty, it's a unilateral emphasis on combatting racism. It's always something; always some issue that is *not*

unimportant, but which becomes unilaterally important, threatening to take over the entire life of the church, moving us away from the primary focus which ought to be Christ and His Gospel. There is always something, even a good thing, vying for the unilateral attention of the church. And we need to make sure that our church; that this local church, has its attention fixed on Christ and Christ crucified. And every other matter or topic must be subservient to; indeed, even come out of, that primary fount.

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25