

## LOOK, THE LAMB OF GOD

John 1:19-34

Key Verse: 1:29

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”

In verses 1-18, John the Apostle declared that Jesus is the Word of God, that is, the eternal Creator God. Yet the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. It was to make a relationship with us. It was to save us from our sins and give us eternal life. Praise Jesus!

In today’s passage, verses 19-34, John the Apostle presents the testimony of John the Baptist. Through this testimony we learn more about Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God. Jesus is the Son of God. Let’s listen to John’s testimony and accept Jesus into our hearts.

First, make straight the way for the Lord (19-28).

Look at verse 19. “Now this was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.” John the Baptist had been preaching a message of repentance. His simple message, backed by his holy life in the wilderness, had a profound effect on the people of Israel. Many were cut to the heart. They wrote long, repentant testimonies and shared them with John. Afterward, John baptized them in the Jordan River. Their sin problem was not really solved. But they were strangely happy to have their sin problem exposed and to confess their sins. The people wanted someone to deal with their sin problem. Soon John became known all over Israel; many came to him. The Jews of Jerusalem, the national religious leaders, took note of John’s ministry and sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.

How did the dusty desert preacher respond when religious dignitaries visited him? He said, “I am not the Christ.” The religious leaders usually spent thirty minutes on introductions and flattery before coming to the point. John immediately perceived their intention. Before they could ask, “Are you the Christ?” John said preemptively, “I am not the Christ.” Verse 20 says John did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Christ.” John was ready to say, “I am not the Christ.” John was free from the desire for human recognition. He had a pure and single desire to magnify Christ. The religious leaders could not understand John at all. They persisted in trying to identify him, asking, “Are you Elijah?” “Are you the Prophet?” But John refused to talk about himself. He could have. Once Jesus said that John was Elijah. It was because John fulfilled God’s promise to send a forerunner (Mt 11:14; 17:11; Mal 4:5-6). But John did not elaborate on his identity at all. In fact, his answers got shorter and shorter, “I am not the Christ.” “I am not.” “No.” John totally denied himself. It was to magnify Christ.

Look at verse 22. “Finally they said, ‘Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’” Here the questioners, in desperation, reveal their real motive. It was to take back an answer to their superiors; it was to do their job for their organization. Despite their religious facade, they were struggling to survive. They were not really interested in the truth. Nevertheless, John answered their question. Look at verse 23. “John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the desert, “Make straight the way for the Lord.”’” John really wanted to help them think about the Christ. So he had a Bible study with them. According to Isaiah’s prophecy, God would send a forerunner before the Christ to prepare the way for him. John was that forerunner. His baptism of repentance was to prepare the way for the Lord. It meant that the promised Messiah was coming! Therefore, people should not be too interested in John, but they must prepare the way for the Lord.

John’s point was crystal clear: The Christ was coming. So people must prepare their hearts to accept him with sincere repentance. But some Pharisees who had been sent tried to turn the conversation another direction. Look at verse 25. “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet.” These Pharisees were very concerned about the issue of authority. Perhaps they pointed long, bony fingers at John and said, “You are baptizing without a license. This is a terrible violation of our religious hierarchical system.”

How did John deal with them? Look at verses 26-27. “‘I baptize with water,’ John replied, ‘but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’” John explained that his water baptism was not the most important thing. What mattered most was that the Christ had come. The Christ, God’s King, was standing among them, but they did not know him. John made every effort to reveal Christ. John turned every conversation to Christ. In this way, John made straight the way for the Lord. Like John, let’s make straight the way for the Lord. We must be quick to reveal Jesus to others. We can do so when we love Jesus.

Second, Look, the Lamb of God (29).

Thus far, we thought much about what John did not say. But in verse 29, we learn what John really wanted to say and the main point of his testimony. He introduced the Christ to his people Israel and to the world. Look at verse 29. “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” Here, John calls Jesus “the Lamb of God.” The name, “the Lamb of God,” tells us much about Jesus.

When John called Jesus, “the Lamb of God” it had a deep background in the Old Testament. The first time the word “lamb” appears in the Bible is when it was spoken by little Isaac, when he was traveling to Mount Moriah with father Abraham. As we know, God wanted to test Abraham’s love for him. So he commanded him to offer his one and only son Isaac, whom he loved, as a burnt offering. Abraham said nothing about it to anyone, but set out together with Isaac fully intending to obey God’s command. As they walked along, Isaac noticed that the sacrifice was missing. So he looked up innocently at Abraham and said, “Father, the fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham did not say, “You are the sacrifice this time, my son.” Instead he said, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (Gen 22:8). Abraham saw the coming Messiah who would suffer and die for the sin of the world. When he obeyed God’s command through that event, Abraham could understand God’s heart. God would offer his one and only Son as a ransom sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. God did this because he loves sinners. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

The word “lamb” appears 99 times in the NIV Bible. The first 49 times it appears is in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. These books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, were inspired by the Holy Spirit and spoken through Moses. In these books “lamb” usually refers to a sacrificial lamb that makes atonement for sins. This practice began with the Passover lamb as explained in Exodus chapter 12. At that time, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. They worked hard every day with no pay. They were poorly fed and ill clothed. They were whipped and beaten without mercy. What they really needed was not improved working conditions, but freedom from bondage. Yet there was nothing they could do. Their strength was too puny. It seemed that Pharaoh and the power of Egypt would rule the world forever.

However, there is a God in heaven. God looked down on the Israelites and was concerned about them. God raised up Moses to deliver them. Through Moses, God sent plagues against the Egyptians. God revealed his power and wisdom, and his intention to set Israel free. Pharaoh resisted God for a while. Finally, God announced a plague of death against all the firstborn sons of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of the lowest slave. It would be a decisive event that would set Israel free. God did not execute this plague based on race or nationality. Through his word, God gave instructions about how to escape this plague. God’s word of instruction was the way of salvation. This salvation was available to anyone who obeyed God’s instructions. He told the Israelites to slay a defectless, year-old lamb. They were to eat its meat and to spread the blood of the lamb on the doorframes of their houses. When the angel of death visited Egypt, he would pass over houses with blood on the doorframes. In Exodus 12:13, God said, “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.” God did exactly as he had said. Those who had blood on the doorframes of their houses were spared. Those who did not lost their firstborn sons; there was no exception.

One of the things the book of Romans taught us is that the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the godlessness and wickedness of men. In America godless people provoke God to anger every day. Sometimes we tremble at the realization that God will bring justice to our nation. But Jesus, the Lamb of God, saves us from God's wrath. When we accept Jesus in our hearts, God recognizes us as his children. He passes over us in the time of wrath and enables us to live a blessed life even when the world is like a war zone spiritually.

Jesus does more than save us from God's wrath. Jesus saves us from the bondage of sin. As Pharaoh and the Egyptian Empire held the Israelites captive, Satan and the power of sin hold human beings in bondage. No one can break free from this bondage by his own strength. However, Jesus takes away the sin of the world. Jesus took upon his own body the sins for which we should be punished. Jesus bore them on the cross. Jesus shed his blood and died on the cross for our sins. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." Thus, Jesus takes away the sin of the world. Those who have faith in Jesus are set free from the power of sin and become holy children of God. 1 Corinthians 5:7 says, "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed." This means that we are no longer bound by the power of sin. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus. Our relationship with God is restored. Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God." Now we can stand before God with a clean conscience. We can enjoy God and receive his love and power and joy in our souls. We can serve God in holiness and righteousness, as we really want to do. To do so, we must look at Jesus the Lamb of God. We must not look at ourselves. We must not look at other people. We must not look at the present situation. We must not look at the troubled world. We must look at Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

The phrase, "the Lamb of God" also shows us the character of Jesus. Jesus has many names or titles in the Bible. It is because Jesus is God and Jesus is many-sided. Through his title "the Lamb of God" we can learn that Jesus is gentle like a lamb and humble in his obedience to God. Isaiah 53:7 says, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." The mission God gave Jesus was a hard one. It was to suffer like a criminal and die on the cross for the sin of the world. Jesus took this punishment and death even though he was innocent. Jesus carried it out silently, so silently, with no word of complaint. Jesus carried it out willingly. We who are called to live as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation are obliged to learn of gentle and humble Jesus in his obedience to God.

The word "lamb" appears frequently in one more book of the Bible. It is the book of Revelation, which was also written by John. In fact, it appears 29 times in Revelation, 28 of which are capitalized and refer to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Throughout Revelation, the Lamb is pictured in heaven. At first, he looks as if he had been slain. Yet the Lamb appears in the center of God's throne. The Lamb is the object of worship of the holy beings in heaven. The Lamb alone is found worthy to open the seals and release the judgment of God against the unbelieving world. The Lamb is finally revealed as the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. The Lamb destroys the devil and his agents and puts them into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The Lamb brings the saints who have been cleansed by his blood into a heavenly wedding banquet for eternal life with him. The Lamb reigns forever in the new heaven and the new earth, our home of righteousness. All who worship the Lamb will reign forever with him. Amen.

Third, Jesus is the Son of God (30-34).

Look at verse 30. "This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" John testifies that Jesus is the eternal God. Look at verse 31. "I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." It is interesting to know that John did not know who the Christ was when he began his mission as the forerunner. John simply began preaching and baptizing by faith. But one day, as he was baptizing, Jesus came to him. Unlike others, who looked shameful and guilty as they came and confessed their sins, Jesus was holy and pure. Jesus had no sins to confess. Recognizing this, John hesitated to baptize Jesus. But Jesus insisted that it be done. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, something amazing happened.

Look at verses 32-34. “Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”’” Here we learn two things. First, we can come to know Christ personally when we accept the word of God and experience the work of the Holy Spirit. When God sent John to prepare the way for the Lord, he did not tell him who the Lord was. But he told him that the Spirit would come down from heaven and remain on him. John held this word from God in his heart and watched for the Christ day by day. At last the Holy Spirit fulfilled the word and John recognized Jesus. John testified, “...this is the Son of God” (34). We must accept the word of God by faith. Then the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see Jesus, the Son of God. Second, we learn that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, he burns away our sins and purifies our souls. The Holy Spirit enables us to live a powerful and dynamic life for the glory of God.

Today we learned that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Let’s accept this word of God by faith and ask the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.