

I AM the Lamb of God

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church family. For those of you who don't know me, my name's Bec, and I'm going to be doing the Bible reading today. If you haven't checked your bulletin, or if you have, you might realise we're going to read three different passages in John this morning.

So we're going to read parts of John chapters 1, 12, and 9. So first, will you turn with me to John chapter 1, and we're going to read verses 29 to 36 together.

So before Jesus started his public ministry, this is what John the Baptist said about him, starting from verses 29. And John bore witness.

The next day, John was sent to the Bible, and he said, Okay, let's turn now to chapter 12, and we're going to start at verse 20.

So only days before his crucifixion, we hear Jesus' understanding in these verses for what his death would achieve. So John 12, verse 20. Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.

[2 : 08] So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew.

Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, And where I am, there will be my servant be also.

If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him. Now is my soul troubled.

And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.

Then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered.

[3 : 40] Others said, An angel has spoken to him. Jesus answered, This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world.

Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Okay, the last reading to turn to now is John chapter 19. And we're going to read verses 28 to 37, where we will read about Jesus' final moments on the cross.

So John 19, starting at verse 28. After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said, to fulfill the scripture, I thirst.

A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, It is finished.

[4 : 52] And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Since it was the day of preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for that Sabbath was a high day, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness. His testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth, that you also may believe.

For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled. Not one of his bones will be broken. And again, another scripture says, They will look on him whom they have pierced.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, this is what we're up against today. I'm going to quote C.S. Lewis.

[6 : 10] The natural life in each of us is something self-centred, something that wants to be pitied and admired, to take advantage of other lives, to exploit the whole universe.

And especially the self wants to be left to itself, to keep it well away from anything bigger or stronger or higher than it, anything that might make it feel small.

It's afraid of the light and air of the spiritual world, just as people who have been brought up to be dirty are afraid of a bath. And in a sense, the self is quite right.

It knows that if the spiritual life gets a hold of it, all its self-centredness and self-will are going to be killed. And it's ready to fight tooth and nail to avoid that.

I'm going to pray. That's what we're up against today, I think. So I'm going to pray before we come to God's word. Father, no words of ours are strong enough to declare what you've done, but your word is.

[7 : 33] And so I'm just going to echo your son's prayer. Father, glorify your name in each of our hearts and together as your people now.

In Jesus' name I ask. Amen. Well, we've already seen all the seven I am statements and we've seen something bigger, stronger, higher than us.

Jesus, the bread, just to, I'm just trying to tweak our memories here. The bread, the light, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and life, the way, truth and life, the true vine.

We've done the seven, so why are we having another sermon? Because if we stopped here, we'd be stopping short of the greatest revelation of who the I am is.

A major theme in this gospel is the hour. Hour. You're all hoping I keep to under an hour. The hour. At the start of his ministry, his first public miraculous sign at the wedding in Canaan, Jesus says, my hour has not yet come.

[8 : 58] And then in chapter 7, verse 30, his opponents are seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come. Again, in chapter 8, verse 20, it seems that he has God's full protection.

He's invincible because his hour had not yet come. It's as if all the clocks of the universe are waiting for this moment.

So all the I am declarations that we've heard so far, they're either stripped of meaning or filled with meaning depending on this hour. We haven't yet heard the testimony of the one man who saw Jesus more clearly than even his 12 disciples, during his lifetime at least, and that is John the Baptist.

God gives him a sneak preview, a sneak peek into this hour. Now, apparently, in the dusty streets of Israel, you walk in dusty streets all day long and when you're wearing sandals, your feet are just disgusting by the end of the day.

Like, I'm picturing when I mow the lawns wearing shorts and it's just, the dust and the grass is just caked on. Now, no noble person with a servant in the household, if they're Jewish servant, would ask their servant to take off their sandals.

[10 : 32] Like, it's just, it's just disgusting. It's degrading. And John says, he doesn't only say, the one who's coming after me, I'm only worthy to untie his sandals.

If he said that, he'd be saying, I'm less than even a servant, a slave. He said, I'm not even worthy to do that, he's so great. The one who's coming, he just, he's so far above us, he blows our categories of thinking.

And John had revealed who this great one would be and he testifies that he saw the spirit coming down at his baptism, he knows the one. And what category does John use to describe him?

He's got all the Jewish scriptures to use categories, to find a category for his greatness. Is he a high priest? Is he a prophet like Moses? Is he the son of David, the king David?

What category? Behold the lamb. Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[11 : 48] I don't know about you, but a lamb, that just conjures up, I don't know, feelings like I've got for a puppy dog or something at best. Not even that. Not even that.

This weak, maybe cute, maybe dirty. But for a Jew, it conjures up blood.

Sacrifice. I wonder if John could have known that this great one would at the end of his life tie a towel around his waist and wash his filthy disciples' feet.

I wonder if that would have just blown John's categories. I don't know. John's saying, Behold the lamb of God.

Don't just take a quick look. Gaze upon him. Do you see the lamb? Do you see his greatness? John said, He's sent ahead of time so that you and I don't miss it.

[13:09] At the heart of God's plan is for his son to be the lamb. So we're going to fast forward now. This is a bit of a summary sermon, okay?

So I hope you strap yourselves in. We're going lots of places. So three years of Jesus' public ministry and then from chapter 12 onwards, we're in the final week of his life.

Chapter 12, verse 1. Jesus has a dinner. Mary and Martha put on a dinner for him because they brought their brother back to life.

And what does John want us to know? That it's six days before the Passover. Pilgrims are flocking to Jerusalem during this time.

They're remembering their identity as God's people. They're remembering that God would judge Egypt, striking at the future, the next generation, killing the firstborn in every family.

[14:21] And that could be young or old, the firstborn in every family. The firstborn carried on the name. It was a terrible, terrible judgment. But Israel were not to think that they were better than Egyptians.

The judgment would fall on them too unless a lamb's blood was painted, as you know the story probably, painted on the doorpost.

There must be a substitute. At the heart of Israel's identity of this feast is to remember the substitute that bears the judgment of God on the world.

Don't miss the forest for the trees. Six days before the Passover, chapter 13, verse 1. Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

And then he's arrested, he's trial, he's before Pilate, and chapter 19, verse 14. We're reminded once again of the timing.

[15:35] Now it was the day of preparation of the Passover. The reason the Jews wanted those two criminals, either side of Jesus' legs broken, is because it was the Sabbath the next day, and it would defile the land if you leave a dead body out in the open.

They're concerned with that. But that Sabbath was a high day. In other words, it was Passover. It was the feast. It was the Sabbath of the Passover.

They're so concerned with the Passover. Of all the details that John chooses to report, he knows Matthew, Mark and Luke are written.

What does he focus on? He's amazed that a spear with an iron point on it goes through his human body and doesn't even break a rib. He's amazed.

He was so close to having his legs broken. And he sees that as the lamb that couldn't have any broken bones.

[16:44] It had to be perfect. It had to be spotless. He sees that it's a hyssop branch that they use to paint the door frame.

It's just Passover, Passover, Passover. John is looking at this corpse. Like, I don't know if you've seen a dead body. It doesn't even look human, almost.

And he's going, that's the lamb. That's the lamb. God is offering up his firstborn as a substitute. God could look at Abraham as the kids. He could look at Abraham and say, now I know you love me. You did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love.

And we can look at God, the Father, and go, now I know you love me. You did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love. We're not to think of Jesus' death as accidental.

[18:02] He is a victim, but he is in full... John wants us to focus on the fact that he is in full control. John was with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane when he's arrested.

The band of soldiers are bringing torches. At Passover, there would have been a full moon, so it would have been quite light. They were probably expecting to have to search for Jesus.

Jesus would be hiding in the bushes type thing. They're going to have to search for him. No, verse 4. Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, Whom do you see? And they answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am. And they drew back and fell to the ground. No one took his life from him.

Even as he suffocated on the cross, he knew that all was now finished. He's motivated by fulfilling the Father's plan.

[19:08] He takes a drink just to say one final phrase. It is finished. He's in full control here. This hour was planned in Scripture even since that first exodus.

Now, what does this mean? Well, sadly, many people who bear the name Christian, they see power in the cross only, only in its ability to be an example for us.

That we should lay down our lives. And if we all did that, the world would be fixed. They want to reject all this talk of blood and judgment and sin.

He's an example. Here's what love looks like. Now, here's the problem with this. And I'm going to quote Leon Morris here because he says it better than I could.

If Christ was not actually doing something by his death, then we are confronted with a piece of showmanship and nothing more. Someone once said that if he were in a rushing river and someone jumped in to save him and in the process lost his life, he could recognize the love and sacrifice involved.

[20 : 41] But if he was just sitting safely on the land and someone jumped into the torrent to show his love, he could see no point in it and only lament the senseless act.

Unless the death of Christ really does something, it is not, in fact, a demonstration of love. The example to us only has power if he's our substitute for sin.

If he really is taking away sin. If he's jumping into that river for us. And this fills all the I am's with meaning.

I am became meat. He tabernacled. He became flesh and blood. Why? In order to become our lamb.

To take away the sin of the world. The Israelites ate men in the desert, but they died. His flesh and blood is true bread.

[21 : 48] If we eat on it, if we believe in what he did that day, that hour, he makes the difference between dying in the wilderness or making it to the promised land.

He opens the eyes of the man born blind. He is the light of the world. It's at the cross that we see. We are given eyes to see God's holiness and our sin and his love.

It's only at the cross we have eyes, spiritual eyes given to us. He's the only door because of the cross.

He's the good shepherd. Lays down his life for the sheep. He trades places with Lazarus in the tomb. The only reason our resurrection is sure is because he traded places.

He is the only way to the Father. When we look on his love, that is the true vine that we draw on.

The cross fills all those I am's with meanings or it strips them.

[22 : 52] They're meaningless really. The way I thought about it is I think the one that Moses encountered in the burning bush.

That I am became that lamb. Who would have thought of that connection?

I don't have to repeat myself. The I am became the lamb. Now substitution is the essence of sin as well as the essence of salvation.

This is why we need a lamb. I remember a man telling me years ago, he was describing this motorbike training day and the instructor was just talking down to him and just in a patronising way apparently.

And this guy, he was angry because he had a high education, he had a high paying job, a very respected job. It was one of those jobs that if you said it, everyone was like, oh.

[24 : 21] And he was angry. If that instructor knew who I am, who I was, he wouldn't treat me like that. I think that's what C.S. Lewis is talking about in all of us.

That natural self in us that thinks we're great to be pitied or admired. The essence of sin is that we assert ourselves as I am.

If you knew who I am. We assert ourselves to where only God deserves to be. And the essence of salvation is that the I am substitutes himself for where we deserve to be.

He's got to be our lamb who takes away that sin, that self-assertion. For in the lamb, in chapter 12, we also see that in the lamb you see I am.

I don't know if that sentence makes sense. It sounded good in my head. In the lamb you see I am. It kind of rhymes. Look at, we're going to stay in chapter 12.

[25 : 43] If you're following along in your Bible. Chapter 12, verse 31 and 32. Here's Jesus' thoughts about his death.

We've heard John the Baptist. We've heard John the Gospel writer. We have insight in chapter 12 of what Jesus thought about his death. Now here's what verses 31 and 32 should say.

And by, I'm not trying to rewrite scripture, you'll see what I'm saying. Now is the judgment of Jesus Christ. Now will the ruler of this world, I think referring to Satan, have his greatest triumph. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I'm going to repel everyone. That's what it should say, shouldn't it? Amen. Amen. Let's see if someone remembers the call and response on Easter Sunday.

Surely we've got some Anglicans in the room. Christ is risen. It's a victorious day, isn't it?
[26 : 52] All right, let's try this. Christ is crucified. Where's the victory?

I'm not trying to put you on this. I'm not having a go at you, by the way. I'm just saying how we frame, how we usually think about the Gospel is his death was necessary and his resurrection ascension was his glory.

But John 12, now that's true, by the way. He's vindicated. He's glorified. That's absolutely true. But John 12 is saying his death is his glory.

Some Greeks are seeking him.

Jews have already decided he's got to die. Greeks are seeking him and that's what triggers. My hour has come. For what? Verse 23.

[28 : 02] The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Now, for Jews, Son of Man, Daniel 7, it is a prophecy of one who's going to receive the world as his kingdom.

All peoples and nations and languages should serve him. It is a picture of power, dominion, authority worldwide forever.

Son of Man. So, when we hear glorified. And then verse 32. If we just plucked verse 32 right out of its context.

And I, when I'm lifted up, when I'm exalted and glorified from the earth, will draw all people to myself. We would be thinking resurrection, ascension.

But we've got to keep it in its context. Verse 33. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. John loves his double meanings.

[29 : 07] He's saying, I'm going to be physically lifted up on that cross and in that moment I'm exalted by God. This is what the world thinks of me. And this is what God thinks about me.

In that one act of being lifted up. I had this automatic reaction to a pastor I was listening to this week in preparation.

Dick Lucas. Here's what he says about this passage. What John wants us to understand, therefore, is that the throne of Christ is his cross. I heard that.

I'm like, that's not right. There's something in me that's like, that's not right. He's in heaven now. That's his throne. I wonder if you're struggling with this as well.

Because it messes with our categories. I want to press the paradox in by making sure we just don't have romantic ideas about this cross.

[30 : 09] Using unbelievers words, Tom Holland in Dominion. A book called Dominion.

He describes crucifixion in the Roman Empire like this. No death was more excruciating, more contemptible than crucifixion. To be hung naked, long in agony, swelling with ugly welts on shoulders and chest, helpless to beat away the clamorous birds.

So foul was the carrion reek of their disgrace that many felt tainted even by viewing a crucifixion.

And Jesus is saying, when that happens to me, I'm glorified.

I'm lifted up. That when people see me on that cross, all cultures, all subcultures are going to be attracted, not repelled, attracted and moved to worship.

[31 : 27] People are going to worship me because of that disgusting image and believe that they want to follow me into that and believe that dying like that is the full life.

That to die to self in service of this crucified one is the fruitful life. It is participating in eternal life when we die like him.

It is the honoured life. He sees it as his triumph. Father, glorify your name.

I am. Glorify your name. I am. Name is reputation. Reveal who you are, Father, at the cross.

Not just afterwards. It's the greatest display of I am. I think Revelation 5 agrees with Dick Lucas that the throne of Christ is his cross.

[32 : 51] Martin Luther describing God's nature this way, the crucified God. Who is it we see in Revelation 5? Who is in that throne room?

The one worthy to bring, the only one worthy to bring about all God's plans. A lamb standing as though it had been slain. Who are the angels? Thousands upon thousands.

What are they doing with all their might? They're saying, worthy is the lamb who was slain. What is every creature in heaven and on earth and in the sea?

Who are they acknowledging as Lord? To him who sits on the throne and to the lamb. I think you only believe in the real heaven, the true one, the one that's actually there.

If you're looking forward to praising the lamb forever and ever and ever. I think this means we shouldn't leave the cross behind.

[33 : 53] It's not just the start of our Christian pilgrimage, the means, the mechanism of how we're saved. All scripture is pointing to this hour and back to this hour. When we look at the cross, we see the crucified God.

We see God on his throne. We see the greatest display of I am. This is God's nature at the cross. It means faith in Jesus' miracles alone is not genuine faith.

John's Gospel brings that out. People believed in his miracle. Not, that's not enough. You can't believe in Jesus to have power to fix your problems in life.

That's not, you haven't seen the glory yet. And you can't be driven to Jesus in fear of punishment.

You have to be drawn to him. When I'm lifted up, I'm going to draw all men to myself. I'm going to. I know right now I've got no power to draw you to Christ, but he can.

[35 : 06] His cross does. You can't be driven to him in fear. So the question is, are you drawn to him? Are you drawn to him? Are you drawn to him?

We can all detect false love when we see it, can't we? When, or sometimes where we realise later on, but when you need something but someone withholds what you need, like the truth, or what they're actually thinking, or whatever help they need.

When they withhold something. When you realise someone's manipulating you. That's false love, isn't it? They're treating you as a means to some other end.

Or when someone's not, they're just uninvolved. They see you and you're suffering and they're unaffected. We can detect false love, can't we?

In the Passover lamb, don't we see the greatest display of the authentic love of God?

[36 : 24] His love is drained out. It is spent. There's nothing left in the can. It is limitless self-giving.

His love isn't manipulating. He's trying to draw you to himself. It's your choice. He's not using you as a means to some other end.

You're the end. And how involved can you get? How affected can you get?

One person put it this way. The son suffers dying. The father suffers the death of the son. The grief of the father here is just as important as the death of the son.

The fatherlessness of the son is matched by the sonlessness of the father. There is no greater demonstration of the love of God than at the cross.

[37 : 40] So Jesus, his cross is simultaneously judging the world while drawing people from all over the world to himself. And I'm going to use John 3 to explain that.

Because what does it mean that now is the moment of judgment? What does that mean? Because John 3, God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

This is the judgment. The light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. I'm picturing it in my mind.

I don't know if it's helpful to you or not, but it's like this tsunami of light has gone out into the world from the cross. And the question is, are you drawn to it?

Or are you hiding from it? Do you prefer the darkness? Do you love the fact that he takes judgment for you as the Passover lamb?

[38 : 51] Or do you not want that? And if you're repelled by such a demonstration of the love of God, then really you're judging yourself.

Your natural self is fighting tooth and nail. It knows that if this gets into you, this kind of love, it kills your self-centeredness.

This kind of love, it kills your self-will. So either you're repelled by the cross, but I really pray that you're drawn.

In the lamb, you see I am. Let me pray. Lord, forgive our hearts that treat your cross as, for those of us who have grown up in the church or been in the church many years, we can feel like we can learn nothing new and not be drawn afresh.

So forgive us for any attitude in me and us in that. But I pray for your spirit's power. Lord, I pray for your love. As you called Lazarus out of the tomb, you might awaken us to your great love seen at the cross.

[40 : 25] Lord, I pray that you'd make us never tire of it. I pray that the cross would get bigger and bigger so that following you, our lives would be shaped by such a love.

And Lord, we just look forward to your return and when we see you in all your glory and that we'll be praising your sacrifice for endless days.

So we look forward to your coming back. In Jesus' name, amen.