

Behold, the Lamb of God

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[0:00] Amen. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So I want to start this morning by thanking all of you for your prayers for my recovery.

I am easing back into the land of the living, as some of you are as well. I did somehow manage to pull a muscle in my ribs from coughing, so I'm a little sore.

Our brother Mark Steele suggested that while I celebrate Holy Communion, maybe people should hold up my arms for me like Moses' elders. Do we have any volunteers for that?

All right. So I think what we see in John chapter 1 this morning prompts a really central question.

[1:14] Who is Jesus? Now that sounds like a pretty simple question, doesn't it? Can you think of a question that is more important than that one?

It is after all through faith in Christ and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world that we receive the forgiveness of sins. So we can't afford to be unclear about our answer to this question because there is too much at stake.

Now I say this with a very recent event in mind. A little over a week ago at a cathedral in the Scottish Episcopal Church, a place that was built and intended for the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, they celebrated Epiphany in a rather unusual way by including readings from the Quran in the service.

Can you believe that? They observed a feast that is supposed to be about the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God by reading from a text that denies that Jesus is the Son of God.

A text that denies that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now it should be obvious to all Christian believers that this is wrong.

[2:31] It should go without saying that this is wrong. But we can't let it go without saying because in our world today people are being deceived. We have to be clear about who Jesus is and about what the gospel is.

Because some of those who have been tasked with proclaiming the truth are clearly acting as wolves rather than shepherds. We have to be clear about who Jesus is because there is a lot of falsehood out there, some of it being spread by people who should know better.

To be faithful to Jesus as a church, we have to be committed to being clear about the person and work of Jesus Christ, about the gospel, to speak without hesitation, without shame, about the unique cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb of God, because without that there is no gospel and there is no hope of eternal life.

Our gospel reading for this morning is concise, it's to the point, but it doesn't leave any room for doubt about who Jesus is, does it? In fact, it gives a clear, condensed presentation of who Jesus is and the proper response to knowing who Jesus is.

A lot of what we hear about Jesus in this passage comes from the lips of John the Baptist. What does he say about Jesus? Well, I'm certainly probably all remember that he says, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[4:11] We'll get to that in a minute. But there's something important in the text that I think might be easy for us to miss if we're not careful. Notice what John says in verse 30.

This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. John, here, is acknowledging that Jesus is greater than he is.

We see the same thing a few verses back when John says that he is not worthy to untie the sandals of the Christ. Now here's a man who knows who he is and who knows who Jesus is.

Isn't our knowledge of God always connected with knowledge of ourselves? What I mean by that is that we have to face up to the reality of who God is and who we are.

The more we learn about God, the more we learn about who we really are. The more we learn about who we really are, the more we learn about who God really is. We see the holiness of God, and we see our own unworthiness.

[5:16] We see the greatness of God, and we see our own sin. We see the perfection of Jesus, the glory of Jesus, and we have to acknowledge that we are not worthy even to untie the straps of his sandals.

Even John the Baptist, that great prophet, the one who baptized, the one who called others to repentance, who prepared the way for the Lord, even he had to acknowledge his own unworthiness.

So where does that leave the rest of us? Now it leaves all of us, John the Baptist included, in need of a Savior. Is there any wonder that John, who saw himself for who he was, was so eager to acknowledge and proclaim who Jesus is?

The Son of God, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. We see the gospel message in these simple descriptions of Jesus.

John rightly identifies Jesus as the Son of God. This man, this Jesus, is also fully God, the eternal Son of God, come to rescue us from our sins as only God could do.

[6:29] This Jesus, the Son of God, came to put away our sins, and he did, by bearing them himself, by being a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins on the cross in our place, by rising again, so that we who believe are cleared of our guilt, are forgiven, are justified by his blood, and are cleansed from sin.

This Jesus, he changes hearts. He transforms lives. Doesn't he? He baptizes with the Holy Spirit. He can change a hard, stony, sinful heart into a soft heart of flesh, a heart that is tender, a heart that loves God and neighbor, a heart that pursues holiness, a heart that loves what God loves, a heart that is sanctified.

Jesus can do that. With Jesus, he changes lives, both in this life and for all eternity. Brothers and sisters, we who know him must be clear about who he is and about what he has done.

We must be clear about who we are, about our need for Christ. We must be clear. Because if we are not clear about that, then we are not clear about the gospel.

Recently ran across a really great quote from the well-known pastor and writer Timothy Keller.

Keller had this to say. The gospel is this.

[8:07] We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.

Don't you see that at work? What John the Baptist has to say to us this morning? I am not worthy to untie the straps of his sandals and then behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

I am not worthy, but Jesus has taken away my sin. Now, false religion and false philosophies never get this right.

Often, they'll tell us what is supposed to sound like good news, that we're basically good, that we just need to do our best, that we need to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, and that sounds nice, but what happens?

When we fail to measure up, and we will, and we do, we are left in despair with no hope of rescue. false religion will tell us that God gives us his list of expectations and is then just keeping his list and checking it twice.

[9:23] It won't tell us about a God who loves us so much that when we were in the mess of sin with no means of escape, he came himself to the rescue to die for us.

We are unworthy, but we are loved and accepted in Jesus. The Lamb of God makes all the difference. Now, does that thrill you so much that you just have to tell someone about it?

Can I get a yes? Yes. Certainly had that effect on John the Baptist, I think it's clear to say. We can see from our text that he was doing a little bit of talking about Jesus.

Now, what happens? Andrew hears this, believes, follows Jesus, and what does he do? He goes and tells Simon Peter, who hears, believes, follows Jesus, and as we know, will go on to be used mightily for the proclamation of the gospel.

Do you notice a pattern there? Here in the gospel, believing it, following Jesus, and telling others. Now, here's a question.

[10 : 39] Do you know anyone who doesn't know Jesus as the Lamb of God, who doesn't know Jesus as Lord and Savior? Do you think that there are people in our city, in our neighborhood, who don't know Christ?

Are we going to tell them about him? So here's a challenge to us. in the next week, let's each look and pray for opportunities to talk to someone about the Lord or invite someone to church.

And let's be clear in our witness to the world about who Jesus is, as John the Baptist was clear in his witness, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.