

The Lamb Of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 November 1990

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] It's nice to be here, lovely day out, and I'm going to talk to you about the Lamb of God today.

I'd like to start with the BC Lions, or you remember them, or then there is the, what is it in Calgary? When you get to Calgary, you have Calgary Stampeders, and when you get to Saskatchewan, you have Rough Riders, and when you get to Manitoba, you have Blue Bombers, and when you get to Ottawa, you have Rough Riders again, and when you get to Toronto, you have the Argonauts. Okay, where do we go next? Montreal doesn't exist anymore, does it? What were they? Oh, yeah. Oh, well, that doesn't help that anyway. So I wondered if you could make a little study as to why you have Rough Riders, Blue Bombers, Stampeders, and things like that, Lions.

[1 : 35] But then in baseball, you have White Sox, and Red Sox, and Orioles, and Blue Jays, and things like that. Whether that says something about the sport that we should really understand, I don't know.

But it's about animals. I wanted to draw your attention to that today because of what's here in the text.

And maybe one of you could tell me whether the market today is bullish or bearish. Does anybody know that? I can never figure out which is which.

But anybody got any estimates? I looked it up in the dictionary, and I found out that, yeah, if you're a bull, you're expecting a rise.

And if you're a bear, you're waiting for a fall. Is that the difference? Well, the reason I'm telling you this and that's a lamb, and this is, I don't know.

[2 : 54] This is the beginnings of a monster, you see. So you have a monster on this side and a lamb on this side. And that's sort of the picture I'd like you to have for today of what I'm talking about, that the monster here is coming towards the lamb.

And then you have what was written for us and Tom read for us, where John the Baptist says, Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

Remember we did, John, last week and talked about, he must increase but I must decrease. And that John had to go, in a sense, down in the world.

I think our maturity depends on our ability to go down in the world. Even though we are oriented to go up in the world and to achieve great success and great power and great dominance and all those things, which seem to be that we are upwardly mobile, really finding out about life is the ability to go down.

And in the sense that John the Baptist did it. And John the Baptist did it for a very particular reason. He was able to explore that, what it means to decrease, because he was aware that there was one who was to increase, and it was in his relationship to that one that he was to find life, so that he was to go down, and this one was to go up.

[4 : 37] And the one that he was talking about is Jesus Christ. And when John and his disciples encounter Jesus Christ in the first chapter of John's Gospel, in this passage, it says, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

There is the one you are looking for. There is the one whom God has appointed to be higher than the highest throne, to be greater than the greatest power, to have authority and dominion.

This is the one of whom the book of the Revelation will say, Worthy is the letter to receive glory and dominion and power.

It will all belong to him. And I must decrease and he must increase. And that's what history is all about. So you get that very powerful picture of right at the beginning of John's Gospel, where John the Baptist has the opportunity almost of introducing the whole world to the person of the Lamb of

God.

And you know that that's been carried on. And you know that way back in the beginning, when Cain and Abel brought their offerings, Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought a lamb.

[6 : 12] You'll remember that Abraham, when he was told to take his son and to sacrifice him, and the son said innocently to his father, well, we have the wood, we have everything, but where is the lamb?

And he said God would provide himself with the lamb. And that's taken to be the most powerful picture in the Old Testament of the Lamb of God, whom John the Baptist now declares to us is the person of Jesus Christ.

And then you pick it up again later in the whole sacrificial system in the Torah, how the lamb without spot or without blemish, its blood is shed.

You have the powerful, powerful picture of Moses leading the people out of Israel. And the reason that they are spared on the night of the Passover is because the doorposts of their house are smeared with the blood of the lamb.

And so all the way through Scripture, you get this picture coming up again and again in all sorts of differing circumstances where it comes in a sense to a culmination historically in John the Baptist saying, Behold, the Lamb of God.

[7 : 39] So you get that picture, and that's the picture from verse 29. It says something more, though, in verse 29. It says, this is the Lamb of God.

And just look at the text so you get this firmly fixed in your mind. Look what it says. Who takes away the sin of the world. Now, people have glommed on to that verse because it treats sin, not in terms of what you did last Saturday night or what you're planning to do this afternoon or what you failed to do.

It treats sin as a condition in which we live our lives. Sin is a pervasive reality in which we are all involved.

As far as we are in the world, we are in a condition of sin. And the function of sin is to separate people from people and people from God.

And that's what happens, and this process of separation goes on and on and on so that you have that wonderful picture in C.S. Lewis's Great Divorce where people who go down to hell move to the suburbs and then to the suburbs beyond the suburbs and then to the suburbs beyond those.

[9 : 02] And on and on they go through all time so that when you arrive at headquarters in hell, C.S. Lewis says, and you say, I'd like to talk to Napoleon Bonaparte. He said, well, he's about 30,000 light years out into the suburbs of hell because he keeps moving away.

People keep moving away from each other. The principle of sin is separation. The condition of sin in our world means that people are alienated from each other.

Relationships break down. Relationships with God. Relationships between people. Isolation increases and alienation increases. And that's the process that's going on.

Into the midst of that process marches the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. In other words, the one who is going to change that condition.

He is the one in whom that prevalent human condition is going to be changed. So, you find that that's the picture that John gives us when he says, behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

[10 : 17] What then is going to happen when the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world? Well, the thing that is going to happen is forgiveness is going to take place because forgiveness is the opposite process of that process of alienation and separation.

Something happens which is called forgiveness which reverses the process so you start coming back together again through forgiveness. So, what forgiveness means is that the original, intimate, personal relationship is restored.

Man lives in an intimate and personal relationship with God. Now, you know that in human relationships when people are offended because somebody cheated you or somebody was unfaithful to you or somebody hurt you or something happened that you can say, well, I forgive him but I'm not going to forget or some such statement as that.

But, you see, that's a contradiction in terms really because what forgiveness means is restoration to an intimate, personal relationship with somebody which has once existed and then been broken.

So, that's what's involved in forgiveness. And so, our human attempts to forgive one another almost always prove to be totally inadequate.

[11:55] We can't do it. You know, it's very, very difficult. It's only, in a sense, a divine activity that makes it possible for forgiveness to take place, for us to be restored in our personal, intimate relationship to God.

That's something that God himself has to do to allow us to come back into that relationship. And whatever the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ, his life, his teaching, his death on the cross, I would say his trial, his humiliation, his death on the cross, his interment in the tomb, his resurrection and ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit is in order to take away the sin of the world, to remove that condition as being the prevailing condition that exists in our world.

that's what he came to do. And that's what makes this seaside scene in John chapter 1 where John the Baptist is with his disciples and he says, Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

That, in a sense, is the point at which the whole of history changes direction because of who Jesus is and what he has come to do. See, it's a very, it's a very poignant moment in our understanding and in our history.

Now, there are three ways in which you have to try and understand this. The first way that you need to understand it is in terms of because, you know, the Bible scholars have searched this thing out and have, you know, I mean, one of the great questions is how, in fact, did John the Baptist know to say that?

[14:15] How, what understanding did he have when he made that statement in which the whole culmination of human history is focused?

That this is Jesus who is the Lamb of God who is here to take away the sin of the world.

You know, not just to cover up your bad behavior or my bad behavior or our failures or our weaknesses, but to take away the whole condition of sin so that something else prevails in the relationship between us and God and between us and one another.

And so they say that there are three possible things that John the Baptist might have had in his mind. The first is the Paschal Lamb.

You know, when you, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast that the Paschal Lamb has been slain.

[15:27] Now this Paschal, that word Paschal means Passover. And so it means that the Paschal Lamb, the Paschal Lamb for the whole of humanity and the whole of history has been slain.

Now the original Paschal Lamb, of course, is tied to the Passover story in Egypt where the angel of death passed over the families of the Hebrews so that death didn't touch their families.

Death touched every other firstborn child in the whole of the nation, but it passed over the Hebrew families so that their children weren't lost.

Death passed over them. And the reason that the angel of death passed over was because the blood of the lamb that had been slain was painted on the doorpost.

And that's why Christianity is intimately concerned, and it may be revolting to you, but I'll tell you about it anyway, with the blood of Jesus.

[16:43] And why we talk about the blood of Jesus saving us from our sins. Because somehow his blood means that since we are covered by it, we are not subject to death.

That's what the significance of the blood of the lamb is. And that's what is meant when we at Easter time say, Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast.

There is reason to celebrate because death cannot touch us. The Paschal lamb has been slain.

And then when you look, you see it at the Gospel of John, you find certain interesting things happen.

You find that Jesus Christ is crucified at noon on the day before Passover. That's the dating in John's Gospel.

And this was the moment at which in the ancient religious tradition of the Jewish Hebrew people, the Passover lambs were being slain.

[18:04] It's the same moment in time. They were all preparing for their personal Passover feast. At that same moment, Christ, the Lamb of God, is nailed to the cross on the eve of the Passover.

Passover. It's at that noon hour, you have darkness over the face of the whole earth. You know, the light of the sun was darkened.

And so you have at the scene on Golgotha of the cross of Christ, the lights go out. And darkness at noon marks that day in exactly the opposite way, that at Christmas we celebrate light at midnight. You see, there is light at midnight when Christ comes into the world. There is darkness at noon when he is crucified, when the Paschal Lamb is slain.

It was one of the conditions of the slaying of the Paschal Lamb that not a bone in his body was to be broken. And it's one of the records concerning the crucifixion of Christ that they didn't break a bone in his body.

[19 : 34] When they reached the vinegar up to, I mean, these are just sort of interesting details, but they certainly are provocative ones.

When they put the sponge full of vinegar and held it up to the lips of Jesus, it was on a stick of hyssop, which is the wood that was used, the branches of it, to spread the blood on the doorposts at the Passover in Egypt.

So you get this very powerful picture that Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us, that he has died, and by his blood we are saved.

By his death, we are saved from the power of the angel of death. And so you get that very powerful picture of Jesus, behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, as the Passover Lamb.

that was one way of trying to understand who Jesus was. The second thing that you have is that the Lamb of God that you get, remember, in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, where it says, as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth.

[21 : 06] That you have Jesus, the servant of God, portrayed in the book of Isaiah, so that Christ is portrayed as the one who served us by taking away the sin of the world.

He served us by making it possible to restore to us, as it were, the relationship to God. He served that purpose.

He was estranged, he was humiliated in the extreme. He opened not his mouth, as a lamb before its shearers is dumb.

He didn't speak. He submitted to the terrible humiliation because he had a job to do. And the job he had to do was, if this is God, the job he had to do was to restore us in our relationship to God.

That he would do that for us because we couldn't do it by ourselves. Forgiveness by us or forgiveness of us is not something we can do.

[22 : 27] And he did it. And he did it as the servant of God. And that whole picture is given to you in Isaiah 53. But then, of course, the other thing that he did is say, as I have done this, so you do this.

Because you can't be restored to an intimate personal relationship. relationship to God and him or her over here being restored to an intimate personal relationship to God unless something happens between you.

You see, we can't both claim the work that Christ has done for both of us ultimately demands that we forgive those who have offended us in the same way that Christ has done that work so that we might be related to God.

He's served us in that way so that we might be obedient to him in forgiving one another. That's our work. And that work is the work that Christ, by what he has done for us as our servant, has made possible to restore the intimacy of this relationship to God so that we can restore our relationship to one another.

Now, the third thing which happens, which comes in Revelation chapter 5, where it talks about Jesus in a most amazing way, and I just want to read it to you so that, not because you haven't heard it, but because you've heard it many times, where it turns to the person of Christ and says, it talks about the Lamb, and saying, Worthy art thou to take the scroll, to open the seals, for thou wast slain by thy blood, didst ransom, men for God, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priest to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

[25 : 01] So that what you get is, you get, in this third instance, you get Christ the Lamb of God as the Paschal Lamb, Christ the Lamb of God as the Servant of God in Isaiah 53, and Christ the Lamb of God as the apocalyptic Lamb.

And apocalypse, you know, means the last things. You all know what apocalypse now. Well, they have a picture of total annihilation being the last thing. The apocalyptic Lamb is that he who has been among us in the person of Jesus Christ is ultimately going to be our judge and to reign over us.

He is the one to whom all power and all authority belong. worthy is the Lamb and to him all power and all authority is given. Now, my friend Jacques Elot writes about this and I want just to read that this Lamb of God, the Lamb who conquers, you know how they show in some pictures, in some stained glass windows, the picture of the Lamb with its front a leg sort of around a staff and the staff goes up and there's a flag on top of it, the picture of the conquering Lamb.

I mean, it's hard to take it seriously because it's so contradictory to anything we think of. Lambs do not conquer and yet here at the center of history is the conquering Lamb.

and we simply don't understand that. We don't know how to take it. We have American eagles and Russian bears and all sorts of monsters of one kind or another to denote the terrible power and authority which we institute in human government that are going to take over the world.

[27 : 03] And what happens here? The one who is going to take over the world is a Lamb. How utterly inconceivable. And yet that's what had happened.

And this is what Elul says about it. Here we are in contradiction with the explicit will of history and of men and women who make history.

Triumph of the instinct for preservation at the minimum. The triumph of the will to power at the maximum. the work of man in economic, scientific, technical, or political history is always the quest for domination, for authority, for power, for success, for expansion, for growth.

And this then would be in accord with a devouring and gigantic God, the kind of gods which men imagine, you know, which men create.

Powerful, omnipotent, devouring, gigantic, unassailable God. And how does our God come to us?

[28 : 22] In the picture of non-power, the shorn lamb, dumb before its shearers. And to him will be given the responsibility to judge the world.

So you see this tremendous picture of the Lamb of God as Christ who will stand at the judge over all the nations of the earth.

You know, kingdoms that have risen and kingdoms that have waned, Christ stands in judgment over them. He is the one. And so that at the beginning of history, of this, of the history of the kingdom of God, you know, because it was the message of John the Baptist, repent you for the kingdom of God is at hand.

And what did he mean by that? What he meant by that was the Lamb of God is here. the one who is the Paschal Lamb who dies for us, the servant Lamb who restores us to our relationship to God, the apocalyptic Lamb who stands at the end of history passing judgment on history and in whom all history is fulfilled.

Powerful fellow that, John the Baptist, and a very powerful insight that he's given to us in which we need to come to recognize what our world and our life is all about.

[30 : 04] Let me pray. Father, we think of how John the Baptist stood on the seashore and pointed to the early disciples and said, Behold the Lamb of God.

And in those very simple words, he gave them a glimpse of the whole of human history and the person who shall triumph, the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we bow before the mystery of your purpose revealed in Christ and ask that our hearts may be open, that we may worship the Lamb and that we may be subject to the Lamb, that we may be under the judgment of the Lamb, and that we may not be ashamed.

And we ask this in his name. Amen.