

The Lamb

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles again, and you turn with me to the Gospel according to John, please.

And time is gone, so I won't read the whole section, but... Gospel according to John, the first chapter.

And I'll just read verse 29, first of all.

The next day, John, that's John the Baptist, saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And then again, we read further on in verse 35. The next day, again, John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, Behold the Lamb of God. The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

[1 : 09] Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, What are you seeking? And they said to him, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying? He said to them, Come, and you will see.

So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. Recently, as you know, our minister, Ivor Martin, has been going through Revelations, and a few weeks ago, he had a sermon on the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation, and that's when Jesus comes back.

And he mentioned that night that the whole of the Bible really is the story of the Lamb. And I thought that night, that should be quite an interesting story.

So I decided I would try and find out what it was all about, and I started doing some studying about it. And it's really quite a fascinating story, the story of the Lamb and the Bible.

And we all know what a wee lamb looks like, and a few weeks ago, Murdo Murray gave us a very interesting story about his two lambs. And even the young folks can relate to a lamb.

[2 : 21] And so I'm going to go basically look at the Bible almost as in four sections, almost like, I'm not talking obviously about a film, but very often when you see a film, the director of the film shows you the end first.

And in the Titanic, for example, when you watch it, you see the end of the film first, and you wonder what it's all about. And then it shows you the different scenes leading to the end. And in some ways, what we're reading here about John the Baptist is when he said, Behold the Lamb of God.

I think it's very difficult sometimes for us to understand what John the Baptist was saying there, because John was the cousin of Jesus. And you would expect if John saw Jesus passing by and he was with a group of people, he would perhaps say, Oh, there's my cousin. Do you know him? But he didn't say that. He said, Behold the Lamb of God. And we live in a celebrity culture. And sometimes you might find yourself in an airport and you might see someone important.

The only important people I see are football players. And if I see them, you come home and you'll tell someone that you saw him there. You might not have spoken to him, but you might have seen him there.

[3 : 37] I remember many years ago in Stornoway, the sports shop invited Jock Wallace to open. I think it was to open the sports shop.

And for those of you who are as old as me, you'll remember that Jock Wallace was the ranger's manager. And I have to admit, I sneaked around, although I was a bit older than the young folks, and I got my picture taken with Jock Wallace.

And I was really quite proud of it because to me, he was a celebrity. And this was John the Baptist saying, Behold the Lamb of God. And that was Jesus. So to John, he was really something special.

So I'm going to look back now with you at what that really means. What it says, Behold the Lamb of God. And I have to go back to the Old Testament to start that.

And I'll go through it fairly quickly with you. I hope you try and understand it. I remember when I was younger, if I heard the minister was going to the Old Testament, I tended to switch off a wee bit because I didn't find it all that interesting.

[4 : 38] So I do hope that you will find it a wee bit interesting and that you don't switch off. We're only going to be here for another 20 minutes. And please don't switch off as we try and understand what the Lamb of God meant.

And if you understand what the Lamb of God means, you're on the way to understanding why Jesus came into the world to save sinners. We start with the story of the Bible, obviously, when Adam and Eve fell.

You had the Garden of Eden. It was perfect. They had a lovely place there. We can't even imagine what it was like. But then God told them not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

But they decided they knew better. Eve decided she knew a bit better than God. And she ate of that tree. And she gave it to Adam and he ate it. And you all know the story.

Hopefully you know the story anyway. God came into the garden and asked them, Where are you? And on that day, mankind fell. We often hear about sins.

[5 : 42] I'm not interested as such in the sins because they are symptoms of what has happened to us when we fell in the Garden of Eden. There are many sins we could talk about here from the pulpit.

But the main sin happened that day when we fell and we lost a relationship with God. Adam and Eve had a perfect relationship with God in the Garden of Eden.

And they lost that the day they fell. And you'll remember they were ashamed at their nakedness and they put leaves on their bodies to try and cover them. And then we had a situation where God left us with some hope.

Even in the Garden of Eden, God left us with hope because he killed an animal and he covered Adam and Eve's body with the skin of that animal.

So at the very beginning of the Old Testament, we have the killing of an animal and the skin of that animal covering the body of Adam and Eve. We have sacrifice there and we have blood right at the beginning of the New Testament.

[6 : 46] And from that day onwards, man owed God a debt. He fell. He did something that God did not want him to do.

And from that day onwards, man owed God a debt. Let's move forward to scene two. Scene two is the story of Abraham and Isaac.

And we get that in Genesis 22. And you look at the world around you today and you think it's bad. But you try and read between Genesis 3 and Genesis 22 and see what happened in that short time from when Adam and Eve fell to Genesis 22.

It's quite staggering. In Genesis 6, it says in verse 5, The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And then we had the flood because God decided he was going to destroy the earth. The sin was so bad. And then we had the flood. And after the flood, read it again. And you see it's absolutely staggering.

[7 : 58] You had Sodom and Gomorrah after that. You had them destroyed as cities. Sin was rife. And Abraham understood that sin. Abraham understood the fall of man because he was the friend of God.

And he walked with God. And when we fell with man, there was a debt due to God. And God demanded of every family their firstborn son.

The firstborn son was to be consecrated, set apart to God. And you could redeem that or at least you could pay that back to God by paying shekels every year for your firstborn son.

And Abraham understood that concept of the debt that was owed to God. And it was the debt of sin. And, you know, even on a personal level, if someone seriously does something bad against us, that person has a debt to us.

He has wronged us. And we sometimes want to get our own back. And we do everything possible to get our own back. A few weeks ago, I was talking to someone about a court case I was reading in

the newspaper.

[9 : 12] And I read about it. And I said, well, I really don't think a person should have gone to prison for that. He had gone to prison. I can't remember for how long. And I said, I just don't understand the thinking.

What good is it to send that person to prison? And the person who was talking to me said, justice. That's what it is, justice. We have to have justice in our society.

And then it struck me. God also demands justice. And it's quite staggering to think that God demands justice also. And in society, for example, if someone does a terrible crime and the judge lets him off fairly scot-free, we're up in arms about it.

We're furious and say he should have given him 30 years instead of 10 years and so on. So on a personal level, we want justice if someone has seriously wronged us.

From a society point of view, we want justice if someone has wronged society. I'll just take society as one example. If the person is set free, society pays for it.

[10 : 19] Because, one, there is no deterrent after that. And two, he may or she may be a danger to society. It also means that the victims of the crime, that their lives are devalued.

So, either the person who has committed the crime pays for it, or we as society pays for it. So, Abraham was aware of this concept.

Abraham understood that there was a debt due to God. But even though, what a shock he got when God knocked on his door. And we're looking at scene two in this whole picture.

God said to Abraham, I want you to sacrifice your only son, Isaac. And Abraham must have been absolutely dumbfounded.

He understood there was a debt due to God. God had promised to give him Isaac as the son of promise, through whom all the nations of the world were going to come.

[11 : 18] God had made powerful promises to Abraham. And yet, he came knocking on his door and he said, I am wanting your son to be sacrificed.

And it's amazing the things we read in that short chapter in the Bible, Genesis 22. A lot of detail it doesn't give us. We don't know what Abraham felt.

He doesn't tell us that. But he tells us interesting things, like he left very early in the morning. Why does the Bible tell us that? I'm not really sure. But maybe it's because Abraham couldn't sleep that night.

Maybe he didn't want to tell his wife what was going to happen. So he left before she got up. I don't know. But he certainly went on a journey of two days, at which point he was to sacrifice Isaac.

And what a journey that must have been for him. The New Testament tells us that Abraham believed that God would bring Isaac back to life, even if he did sacrifice him.

[12 : 17] But even so, he was his dad and Isaac was his son. And the most emotional part of it really is when, in verses 7 and 8 of chapter 22, when Isaac turns around to him and says, Daddy says, there's the wood there.

There's the fire. But where is the lamb? And we get back again to the lamb of God. Because God was demanding the firstborn lamb as a sacrifice to himself.

And Isaac knew that. Obviously, Isaac hadn't been told by Abraham where he was going and what he was going for. Because he asked his dad, where is the lamb?

And you can imagine the thoughts of Abraham as he walked with his son, going to the sacrifice and thinking to himself, I know, God, you are a God of justice.

But at the same time, you have given me these great promises for Isaac. How can I reconcile your justice and your promises, your justice and your love for me? How can I reconcile them?

[13 : 21] And he was hoping and trusting that God would provide a lamb so that his lamb would not die.

Many of you in here today may be parents yourselves. And I can't think, I've got two boys myself, and I can't think of any situation where I would sacrifice any of your children.

And yet, this is what God asked Abraham to do. So if you can imagine in this scene, Abraham walking to sacrifice his son with all the emotions, with all the powerful thoughts that must have been going through his mind about God, about his son.

And then he tied his son down and he was ready. He actually had the knife ready to sacrifice him. And God called him and said, no, Abraham, don't do it.

And there was a ram there. And Abraham was told to kill the ram instead of Isaac. And so Isaac could look at that ram and say, the ram took my place.

[14:24] But still the debt was owed to God because God demanded the firstborn. And the firstborn lamb was not provided when Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac.

There was a ram provided as a thanks offering, it's called in the Old Testament. So we have seen one, the fall of man. We have seen two where we see God asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. And God provided a substitute, someone else or something else instead of Isaac. And so we move on a wee bit and we move on to scene three. And scene three was what we read about the Passover.

And you all know the story of the Passover. How Moses had gone to Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go.

And there had been nine plagues prior to this one. And this was the final plague. Again, the plague of the firstborn. And you may think that it was really cruel of God to do that.

[15:34] I'm not going to discuss that today. But what we must remember was that in Egypt there was genocide. We hear about genocide today. We've heard about it in Serbia.

We've heard about it in Rwanda. It's happening throughout the world even today. And in Egypt at that time there was genocide. Every firstborn male in Egypt was killed on the instructions of Pharaoh.

You remember the story of Moses about that. He was also grinding the slaves. There were slaves in Egypt. He was grinding them to the ground so that they would die. And so that they would not live and increase in numbers.

So there was genocide in Egypt. And God was wanting to take his people out of Egypt. And every time there was a plague, it looked as if Pharaoh might let them go.

But he didn't. He refused to let them go. And so we had then the last plague of all. The tenth plague. And, you know, it's really frightening, this tenth plague.

[16:41] And if you, if we have a look at it. Because what God says is that the destroyer is going to come. That's what God calls death.

He calls it the destroyer. And that's exactly what it is. And God said to the children of Israel, the destroyer is going to come this night. And he's going to kill every firstborn in Egypt.

But I'm going to save you, he said. Because you're going to take a lamb. The firstborn lamb. Without spot or without blemish.

And you're going to kill that lamb. And you're going to use that blood and put it over the lintels. And if I see the blood, I will pass by.

I will not kill the firstborn in that home. So that's what the children of Israel said. We're told by Moses to do.

[17:41] And if you read, it's quite interesting. If you read further on, and I don't have time to look it up. It also says, God also tells them that they have to stay indoors.

So what that really means is that if the children of Israel didn't do exactly what God had asked them to do, they also would have been killed.

So they had to stay indoors. Because God is not a respecter of persons as such. This was to go through the whole land of Egypt. And unless the Israelites stayed indoors and did exactly what God had asked them to do, they also would have been killed.

So the destroyer came. And it's an awful thought to think that the destroyer is going to come for every single one of us. And nothing in this world is going to stop it.

Recently, one of the world's, one of the famous men in the world, Steve Jobs, he died of cancer. Now he had everything at his hand in terms of money, wealth, power, medical assistance.

[18:47] But when the destroyer came, nothing could stop it. And he died. And the question for you and me today is, when the destroyer comes, have we got something that will save us?

For the children of Israel, it was a wee lamb. Can you just imagine it? The most powerful nation in the world at that time. And the destroyer was moving through it. And God said to the people, you have a lamb.

Kill it. Put the blood on the lintels and I won't touch you. And in every single household that night in Egypt, there was either a dead lamb or a dead firstborn.

A dead person or a dead lamb. It reminds me of the story I heard many, many years ago. And I've heard it many times since then, but probably over 30 years since I heard it.

A group of young people were away for the weekend. And they were having a great time. It was a group of Christian young people. And there was one young lad there. And he had learning problems, learning difficulties.

[19 : 57] He wasn't as smart as the rest of them. But a lovely Christian young man, the end of the weekend on the Sunday night, they decided they were going to have a testimony meeting. And of course, they chose the guys who could speak in public to give their testimony so that they could tell the others about it.

But we Johnny came up and said to the leader, he said to him in stammering talk, he said to him, I want to give my testimony, he said. And the leaders didn't know what to do, but they allowed them to do it.

And Johnny went up to the stage and gave his testimony. And he just stood up and he was really very, very nervous. He was shaking. And all he said was, he died.

Me no die. And that's what we had in Egypt that night. Every firstborn of the Israelites could look at a lamb and he could say, lamb died. Me no die.

That was the Passover. We move on to Luke now and we see Jesus. And he asks his disciples to come along and he says, he said to them, we're going to have the Passover.

[21 : 10] And when you had the Passover, the head of the household prepared the lamb. He had to get the lamb. And the father of the household, he explained to the children what it all meant.

So the disciples were going to meet with Jesus around the Passover. It was a meal they were going to have. And in every meal there was bread and leavened bread. And there was wine, which was representing the blood.

And there was the lamb in every Passover. And the disciples met with Jesus. And Jesus had told them to go ahead to prepare a place for them. And as they met there, normally as the father started explaining what the Passover meant, they always said when they took the bread, they used to say, this is the bread of my affliction.

Of our affliction, our ancestors suffered in the wilderness so that we could be free. So they explained why they had the bread.

But the disciples got the first shock that night when Jesus said, this is the bread of my affliction. I am going to suffer to give you the ultimate freedom.

[22 : 22] Freedom not just from political and economic bondage, but from sin and death itself. Jesus turned it round. And you can imagine the disciples, remember, they were Jews.

They knew what the custom was. And they would look round and they would say, where is the lamb? This was the first Passover they had ever been at.

And there was no lamb at it. Until Jesus said, I am the lamb. I am the one who is going to give his life for you. I hope I am the one who is going to take your place.

And you could almost hear God saying to Abraham in heaven, Abraham, he said, I'm going to take my lamb. And I'm going to take him up the mountain.

And I'm going to bind him up. And I'm going to sacrifice him. But this time, no one is going to stop it.

[23 : 22] The knife is going to go right through. And I am sacrificing that lamb for you, Jesus said, for his disciples.

And you could go around this whole congregation today and he could say, I am sacrificing him for you, for you, for you. Every single one of us. I'm going to take my lamb.

Can you imagine God giving his only begotten son for me and for you? That's what he did.

One guy wrote, one commentator wrote that God suffered in his silence when Christ cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And God was silent. And that's where he suffered. One of the men I admire a lot today in America is a guy called Chuck Colson. I don't know whether you've ever read one of his books.

[24 : 19] The one when he was converted was called Born Again. And Colson tells the story of his own conversion in Born Again. And in the Senate in America, there was a guy called Al Qie, Q-U-I-E, who really didn't like Colson and the way Colson was.

Colson was in the Nixon administration and Watergate. He was a hatchet man in America. People hated him. And yet God began working in his life. And after Watergate, he was jailed.

He was probably the second most powerful man in the world. And he was jailed in America. While he was jailed, his 19-year-old son was caught dabbling with drugs. And he was being charged and could possibly have gone to prison.

Al Qie, who was a Christian man and who had watched what was happening to Colson, loved Colson for his soul. And he found an old statute on the American legal system that said that he could have gone to prison instead of Colson.

And he was going to go to the President Gerald Ford to ask for permission to take Colson's place. Colson wrote, You remember I mentioned to you the boy who said he died?

[25 : 53] That's what Jesus did for me and for you when he went to Calvary. Stuart Townend is a great writer.

And one of his hymns is, How deep the Father's love for us, How vast beyond all measure, That he should give his only Son To make a wretch his treasure.

Behold the man upon the cross, My sin upon his shoulder. I ashamed I hear my mocking voice Call out among the scoffer.

It was my sin that put him there. Until it was accomplished, His dying breath has brought me life. I know that it is finished. I will not boast in anything, No gifts, No power, No wisdom.

But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. Why should I gain from his reward? I cannot give an answer. But this I know with all my heart.

[26 : 58] His wounds have paid my ransom. The story of the Lamb is a powerful story. It starts with the fall of man. Act two, There's a debt.

Act three, A substitute can pay for it. Act four, I, said Jesus, Am the substitute. I really hope that you begin to understand What Jesus did for us today.

What does it mean to you for a Christian? As a Christian here, It means for you to behold the Lamb. To go out and tell others about him. It should transform your attitude towards other people.

Because all have been made in the image of God. And you should go out and tell them About the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. It should radically alter the way you look at glory and achievement in this world.

In this world, it's take, take, take. The cross says glory and achievement is give, give, give. It changes radically your view of suffering.

[28 : 06] The most undeserved, apparently senseless suffering in the history of the world Worked out to the most good. And, you know, the word excruciating, I don't know whether you know it, But the word excruciatius comes from the Latin, Out of the cross.

It was so excruciating for Christ to go and die for me and for you. It also tells you to eat the lamb with others. It tells you, if you're a Christian, to come to the Lord's table.

But maybe you're not a Christian here today. What does it ask you to do? It asks you to come and see. I plead with you to examine the evidence. I plead with you to look at Jesus and see who he is. Because he is the Son of God. I plead with you to look and answer. To face the destroyer before he comes. Because surely he will come.

I hope and pray that you will find the Christ. Who will cleanse you from all your sin. I have nothing today. No Christian in here has anything today.

[29 : 15] Apart from the fact that Jesus died for them. Nothing else. He died. Me no die. I'll just close with a short poem I came across.

It was written by a teacher. Some of you are teachers here. You will understand it. It talks of a wee boy who came to her desk one day. He came to my desk with a quivering lip.

The lesson was done. Have you a new sheet for me, dear teacher? I've spoiled this one. I took his sheet, all soiled and blotted. Gave him a new one, all unspotted.

And into his tired heart I cried. Do better now, my child. We are children of the king.

And he gives us a new sheet each day. If you don't have that king as your saviour, please come and see and follow Jesus.

[30 : 30] Let's pray together. Lord, we pray that this morning we might see the Lamb of God in a way that we have never seen him before, taking your place on the cruel cross at Calvary.

Lord, open our eyes that we might see Jesus and take us home safely, but above all, take us to heaven with yourself. By following the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we ask this in his name.

Amen.