

**Pastor Jim Lloyd**

**Date: June 5, 2016**

**Title: The Lamb of God**

**Text: John 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!'"* – John 1:29

The question we've considered these past number of weeks is "If I had met someone who had never heard about Jesus, what would I tell them about Him?" There's so much to be said about Jesus – and more is being said about Him today than ever before. In Philip Yancey's book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, he said that a University of Chicago study showed that more has been written about Jesus in the past 20 years or so than was written about Him in the first nineteen centuries. He is easily and without a doubt the most talked about – AND the most scrutinized – character in all of history.

The Setting of Today's Message: Jesus was born in Bethlehem (The Lamb of God was born in a stable.), and then He lived with Mary and Joseph in Egypt for a while. Then they returned to live in Israel, in a little town called Nazareth. We know very little about the early years of Jesus' life, with the exception of one story from His childhood. When Jesus was twelve, He and Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem with a large group of people. On the journey back home, Mary and Joseph suddenly realized that Jesus was nowhere to be found. Jesus was away from the care of His parents.

How many of you saw the news about the 4-year-old boy who fell 10 feet into a gorilla pit? The video clip was rather traumatic. The gorilla was shot and killed to save the child. Animal rights activists were up in arms because the 450 lb. gorilla was killed. They argued that the child's parents were at fault, AND the gorilla should NOT have been shot, which, in turn, means let the gorilla in all probability destroy the child. The media obsesses over an ape. Thousands of people cry that they will miss a zoo animal that they didn't even know existed the day before. When almost nothing is said about the 125,000 abortions that took place the day the gorilla was shot! Thus, we have society's lack of regard for the sanctity of life!

Anyway, anyone here NEVER lose sight of your child? Mary & Joseph did. The thought here is that Mary thought Jesus was with Joseph, and Joseph thought He was with Mary. They returned to Jerusalem to look for Him, and they found Him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening and asking questions. And when His anxious parents said, "We've been looking all over for you," He said, *"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* (Luke 2:49). Would that ALL of us had those words burned in our hearts – I HAVE TO BE IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE!

From there, we don't know what happened for the next 17 or so years, until – at about the age of thirty – Jesus came to John the Baptist to be BAPTIZED. The obvious question is, since John preached a baptism of repentance, why did Jesus need to be baptized, since He Himself had no sin of which to repent? So, why did He get baptized? Even John the Baptist wanted to know, saying, *"It is me who should be baptized by You."* But Jesus merely answered, *"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness"* (Matthew 3:15). In other words, He said, "This is the right thing to do in this moment of time." Maybe Jesus was baptized to give us an EXAMPLE OF OBEDIENCE. Maybe He was baptized to IDENTIFY WITH HUMANKIND. Maybe He was baptized to SYMBOLIZE HIS DEATH & RESURRECTION. We can speculate about the theological implications, but the bottom line is: He was baptized because His baptism *"fulfilled all righteousness"* in that moment. The day after John baptized Jesus, he saw Jesus approaching, and John said, *"Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29). This is not the only time that Jesus is called the Lamb of God, but it is the FIRST time, and it's the key verse for today's message. That's because today we're talking about the ONE THING Jesus came to do that is above and beyond everything else He did while He was here on earth. This is more important than the LESSONS He taught. It's more important than the MIRACLES He performed. He came to TAKE AWAY OUR SINS! Back when Mary first told Joseph that she was expecting a child, Joseph's plan – since he knew the child could not be his – was to quietly break off their relationship so that Mary wouldn't be subjected to public disgrace. But then an angel of the Lord came to Joseph and said, *"Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus..."* – And this is the part I want you to hear – *"because HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS."* (Matthew 1:20-21). That's what Jesus came to do. That was God's plan from the very beginning, that He would send His Son to save us from our sins. That's because, in case you haven't noticed, man has a sin problem. And when we say *"man* has a sin problem," we're talking about the ENTIRE human race, and that includes EACH OF US. If you have ever felt you were separated from God, it's because you WERE separated. SIN separates us from God. We are alienated and separated. We are broken.

We are fallen. And you don't have to take my word for it. Look around. We see it on a global scale; just read the headlines. Many of today's headlines shout the evidence of sin. We see it locally, perhaps in the lives of people close to you. And then, to be honest, it's been present on a personal level. Something isn't right. We are not as we SHOULD be. OR, as the Scripture puts it – *"We ALL, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way..."* (Isaiah 53:6). This is the primary problem with which everyone struggles, and it's the reason why Jesus came into this world – to SAVE US FROM OUR SINS, so that **that which isn't right within us can be made right through Him.**

Today we'll talk about Jesus being the LAMB OF GOD, which means we'll look at some imagery that not everyone is comfortable with. Some people don't want to hear about animal sacrifices and blood atonement and things like that, because they consider it barbaric and outdated. Some churches have removed the blood songs from their hymnbooks. It's true. Some of the Old Testament concepts present a problem for the 21<sup>st</sup> century thinker. But we also need to understand that our holy faith has roots in a culture that dates back thousands of years. It shouldn't surprise us, then, when the ancient text and the ancient rituals sometimes reflect an ancient world view. God has always spoken to people where they are, in language and metaphor that they can understand. In Scripture, we see how He progressively reveals Himself, over the course of time, so that we may know Him. It's up to us today to discern the truth that exists behind the stories and the rituals and the traditions of the ancient texts.

Today, because of JESUS, the ULTIMATE sacrifice, animal sacrifice has nothing to do with being right with God, so we don't practice it. However, for the ancient cultures, animal sacrifice was part of their world. They understood the symbolism behind it. Could it be, then, that God used this symbolism in ancient days because it best illustrates – even for us – the meaning of the death of Christ? JESUS CAME TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS. He came to take away the sins of the world – to put us at peace with ourselves and one another, and to bridge the gap between us and God. The fact is, we're broken. *"We ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* We struggle with our brokenness and often we lose the struggle. But it doesn't have to be that way. You can know what it means – you can know how it feels – to be right with God, and to be right with yourself, and to be right with others. You can make peace with your past, you can experience joy in the moment, and you can have hope for your future. That's what Jesus came to do, because He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, let's talk about that phrase for just a moment.

- 1. THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.** For the first century Jew who heard John speak these words, there were likely two images that came to their mind. **A. The Passover Lamb.** Passover was an ancient Jewish celebration commemorating an event that occurred during the days of Egyptian bondage, somewhere around 1450 B.C. For 400 years the children of Israel had been oppressed slaves in Egypt. Then God sent Moses to Pharaoh to say, *"Let my people go."* Pharaoh resisted and continued to reject God, even when plague after plague was visited upon the land. Finally, God told Moses to tell the Israelites to stay at home and sacrifice a lamb and smear the lamb's blood on their doorposts, because that night the LORD would visit every household in Egypt. And through Moses, the Lord 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"* (Exodus 12:13). That night the households of the people of Israel were spared. Soon after, Pharaoh granted their request to be freed from the bondage of slavery and allowed to leave Egypt for the Promised Land. When the first century Jew heard John the Baptist say, *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,"* he certainly thought of the Passover lamb. **B. The Sacrificial Lamb of Temple Ritual.** Every morning and every evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the Temple for the sins of the people. This was commanded in the book of Exodus. *"This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight"* (Exodus 29:38-39). This sacrifice was made every day until 70 A.D., when the Temple was destroyed. The Old Testament ritual of sacrifice was never intended to be permanent, and was never intended to be taken literally because, the Bible says in Hebrews 10:4, *"It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."* The ritual was intended to be understood as a symbol of what would happen when God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. The blood of an animal can NEVER take away our sins, but through the blood of Jesus Christ – through His sacrificial death – our sins can be forgiven.
- 2. THE CONCEPT OF RESTITUTION.** The idea of sacrifice is difficult for some. Perhaps more easily understood is the idea of RESTITUTION. Imagine a society in which there was NO restitution. Imagine the chaos. You could take something from someone, and never be required to give it back. You could steal from your neighbors, and never face any consequences. There would be no debt to pay to society for your misdeeds, because there's no restitution. You could abuse and mistreat people, oppress them, and nobody would hold you accountable. You could even kill anyone you took a notion to kill, because there's no such thing as consequences, and no such thing as restitution. No society could ever function that way; it would eventually implode. Everyone knows

that. For some reason, though, many think that, even though no society should ever allow its citizens to live in a culture WITHOUT consequences, they think God should. They think that God is being arbitrary when He holds people accountable for their behavior. They say, "If God is love, why can't He just let people do what they want to do? Why does He have to punish people who do wrong?" And then, in almost the same breath, they say, "And why does He allow so much evil in the world?" Did you get that? They want God to let people do whatever they want to do with no consequences at all, BUT they don't want there to be any evil in the world! Do you see the disconnect? Here's the plain truth – WE ARE ALL SINNERS! We've all offended a holy God. We've all done things that SHOULD NOT have been done, and we've all left undone things that SHOULD have been done. I trust everyone here knows that. It's not my intention to try to convince you that you're a sinner. I'll let God's Word and Holy Spirit do that. That's really something only you can recognize for yourself. The problem is that some people can't see it in themselves. One of our prospective presidential candidates is reported to have said that he never asks God for forgiveness, and he justified it by saying, "Why do I have to repent or ask for forgiveness, if I am not making mistakes?" That's the way SOME people see it: "The problem with the world is the REST of the world. It's certainly not me. In fact, if everyone else were more like me, this would be a better place." People who have that mentality often go through life wreaking havoc on everyone around them, and they do it pointing their finger every step of the way, saying, "It's his fault, it's her fault, it's their fault. It's never my fault. So I should be allowed to do whatever I want to do." Every person in the world needs to encounter that moment of truth, and experience that wake-up call when they come to their senses and acknowledge that there is none righteous – NO NOT ONE! That includes ME! G.K. Chesterton said in his letter to Time Magazine: "Do you know what's wrong with the world? I'm wrong with the world. And it's time for me to own up to the consequences." This is the problem that every human being must confront: I'm a sinful person, and I've done things that I can never make right. There should be consequences for my behavior, and restitution must be made, but I CAN'T DO IT! I've never met a person who is serious about their relationship to Christ who hasn't come to this conclusion: I need mercy, I need grace, I NEED A SAVIOR. This is what Jesus' death means to us. When He died on the cross, He died for mankind's sins – every ugly thing you did and every good thing you avoided doing, every hateful word you said and filthy thing you thought, every heart you broke and every spirit you crushed, every person you took advantage of, every time you turned your back on someone in need and every time you exploited a situation to your own advantage, every time you cut someone down to size and every time you tried to puff up yourself, every time you lied, every time you stole, every time you looked at a person of the opposite sex as if they were nothing but an object, every time you shook your fist at God. EVERY SIN was placed upon Jesus, as He hung on a cruel Roman cross. And while He hung up on the cross, the restitution that I should have to and YOU should have to pay to your Heavenly Father for the things WE have done, HE PAID! He was the SPOTLESS LAMB paying the price for a sinful world. That's why the prophet Isaiah said, "*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity (sin) of us all*" (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus Christ came into the world to die on the cross for your sins. And if you think your sins are insignificant, or even non-existent, I suppose you'll have a hard time understanding what His death really means. But if you have ever had cause to despair for the person you've been and the things you've done, I want to tell you the BEST NEWS you will ever hear. JESUS PAID IT ALL! PAID IN FULL! The crimson stain that sin left upon your soul, it has been WASHED CLEAN! That's why God said through the prophet Isaiah, "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*" (Isaiah 1:18).

- 3. CONCLUSION.** We may not understand certain aspects of these ancient rituals, and maybe some things about them get in the way of our modern-day sensibilities, but one thing every honest person here will admit: I know what it's like to come to the end of myself. I know what it's like to be burdened by sin. I know what it's like to owe a debt I cannot pay. I want you to know that today your debt can be paid in full. In fact, I want you to know that your debt HAS been paid in full. YOU ONLY HAVE TO RECEIVE IT! In our culture, consequences must be faced and restitution must be paid – it's the same in the spiritual world. There are spiritual consequences to be faced, and spiritual restitution that must be made. But unlike our society, which is often erratic and unjust, the God of this universe is holy and good and merciful and kind – even though we don't deserve it. He wants so much for you to be at peace with Him, and at peace with yourself, and at peace with others, and at peace with your past, that He sent His Son into the world to do the unimaginable: to make restitution for all the wrong you have done. As the Apostle John wrote, "*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world*" (1 John 2:2). John 3:16 – "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only*

*begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish (BECAUSE OF ONE'S SINS) but have everlasting life.*" Another way to say it is in the words of this song: "He paid a debt He did not owe. I owed a debt I could not pay. I needed someone to wash my sins away. And now I sing a brand new song – Amazing Grace – all day long. Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay." John the Baptist said, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" And now, if you're not right with God, you can say, "Precious Lamb of God, take away my sin," and be clean before the Almighty. Or, if you have already made your confession of faith in Jesus, you can say, "Precious Lamb of God, THANK YOU for taking away my sin and paying my debt."