

This letter is the final lesson of this series on the person of Jesus, “Who Do You Say that I Am?” We have considered many of most prominent names and titles of our Savior that give us a glorious picture of who he is: Jesus, God, the Son of God, Lord, Man, the Son of Man, the Christ, and the Son of David. For our final study, we will consider Jesus being the Lamb of God.

Have you ever killed an animal? Maybe you have hunted a wild animal, butchered farm livestock, or accidentally ran one over. If you have not personally killed one, then maybe you have witnessed someone else kill an animal. Most people have at least dissected an animal in a science class and find it gross; the processes of dissection and of butchering an animal are quite similar. Whatever your experience of killing an animal is, I want you to keep it in mind throughout the lesson. We must always have a good reason to kill an animal, and typically we do so in order to use the animal as a resource for food, clothing, tools, or other materials. Extinguishing the life of another creature that God has made should never be taken lightly, and the process of field dressing, skinning, and butchering an animal is always gruesome. I am not condemning hunters, farmers, butchers, or anyone who eats meat—I, myself, enjoy the process from hunting squirrels to eating barbequed beef. In Genesis 9, God gave us the animals to eat in addition to eating plants, which means that it is a good thing to kill and eat animals in a manner that honors God.

Take a look in your Bible at our passage for this lesson, John 1:29, which says, **“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** John the Baptist is the person in this verse seeing Jesus and proclaiming that Jesus is the Lamb of God. John the Baptist is surrounded by his disciples and a listening crowd, and he sees Jesus walking. Most likely, much of the crowd does not know who Jesus is yet, and their first introduction to Jesus is through John telling them that he is the Lamb of God. What does it mean for Jesus to be the Lamb of God? When we think of lambs, we often think of soft, adorable, and knobby-legged little creatures frolicking around in the springtime among violets and daffodils. Is this the picture John wants us to see of Jesus: a cute, harmless, and innocent little guy? Innocent, yes. Cute and harmless, absolutely not.

When John says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” he is calling Jesus a sacrifice—an animal to be killed—and all of the surrounding crowd would have immediately recognized that. In fact, John is drawing on the sacrificial system in the Old

Testament, namely in the book of Leviticus. An Israelite could offer many different kinds of sacrifices, and each one had to follow many specific rules that the LORD gave to Moses. If a person broke one of God's commandments, then he had to go and offer a sacrifice for that sin, even if he did not know he was breaking a commandment at the time. God knew about his sin, and was angry about it, so a sacrifice had to be made to remove God's anger. So, when the person realized he needed to make a sacrifice for sin, he would select an animal without any blemish or defect from his herds—a bull, goat, or sheep, depending on the kind of sacrifice—and then would take it to the temple. At the temple, the priests would bind the feet of the animal, slit its throat, and collect the blood in order to sprinkle it over the altar. Then, the priest would flay the animal into pieces, saving some of it to burn on the altar for a pleasing aroma to God, saving some to give to the priests to eat (depending on the kind of sacrifice), and taking the rest of it to be burned outside the camp. This sacrificial process was somewhat similar to what hunters, farmers, and butchers still do today.

When the sacrifice was properly made, then the sinner would be forgiven. Beforehand, God was angry because of the person's sin. The person deserved to die. However, instead of the person dying, the animal was to be brought before the LORD and to be killed in the person's place. The sacrificed animal was supposed to take away the person's sin and take away God's wrathful judgment. So, through a sacrifice, God's anger is removed and his approval is obtained. God would be pleased by the sacrifice and the person's repentance. In this way, the person's sin would be atoned for, which means that it would be paid for and removed, reconciling God and the person.

This is what John the Baptist has in mind when he announces Jesus as the Lamb of God. He is saying that Jesus is the one and only sacrifice that God has determined to make for the sin of the world. The entire world is greatly sinful, and this sin needs to be dealt with in order for God to be pleased. Jesus, a man, will be sacrificed for sin. Jesus, God himself, will offer himself up to be slaughtered for us. Jesus was perfect and without sin, which made him capable of being a worthy sacrifice. As I have detailed above, the sacrificial ritual was bloody and destructive. Jesus went through a similar process as he was whipped, beaten, pierced, and crucified. He spilled much blood, his flesh was torn open, and he died a painful, miserable death. Jesus offered himself up as a sacrifice to God for our sins through his crucifixion. Jesus bore our sins in his body, and felt the pain of God's anger against sin in our place, so that we would not have to feel

God's just judgment. And by his body being killed, sin was killed with it. Do you not see God's love for us, that he himself would offer up a sacrifice in order that our sins may be forgiven? He wants to forgive us. He offered himself up as a sacrifice.

Only through Jesus can sins be forgiven. He came to take away sin, to remove it completely so that God is no longer angry against sin and so that God and man can be reconciled. Your only option of your sin being forgiven is through the blood of Jesus. He is the atonement for our sin. Our greatest need is for our sins to be forgiven. We need to have our relationship with God mended. We need to escape the wrath to come. Jesus offers his sacrifice for one and all. Everyone is welcome to be covered by his blood. Jesus has offered himself up once and for all. There is no need for anything else to appease God concerning sin.

Although Jesus came to take away the sin of the world, only those who believe and repent will have their sins forgiven; only those who trust in his sacrifice as the only way to be made right before God; only those who are truly sorry about their sin and turn away from it. Those who truly come to God to have their sins forgiven recognize how terrible sin is. They are sorrowful over it and wish for it to be removed. They want nothing to do with it, so they repent. They see Jesus as their only hope of life and trust in him and all that he says. If you are a Christian, then rejoice in the sacrifice of the Lamb, continue in faith and repentance. Maybe for some of you, you need to evaluate whether you have real faith and repentance. For others, you need to trust in Jesus and turn away from sin for the very first time. Look to the Lamb of God and praise him.

Please pray for our church and community.