

Jesus, the Lamb of God. Isaiah 53:1-7 John 1: 19-34

When John the Baptizer saw Him for a second time down by the Jordan river – after His baptism, after His forty day trial in the wilderness – that was when this name for Jesus, as “**the Lamb of God**,” became embedded in the thoughts and affections of all who have followed Him thereafter.

Just the day before, John had answered a group of priests, Levites, and Pharisees, that while he was neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor Moses, nor God’s promised future prophet, there was such a one, now among them, unknown to them, *a man who ranks ahead of me because He was before me*. Then the next day, seeing Jesus walking towards him once again, John announced to the world, “*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29)

Most people have heard this name for Jesus, but that is where their knowledge stops, because very few know or understand the prophetic implications, for anyone wearing the name, “Lamb of God.”

So today, let’s focus on Jesus as “The Lamb of God,” to better appreciate the full significance of His name. First, we will need to understand both the sacrificial system that God set up in the Law and a singular sacrificial event involved in the deliverance of Israel from slavery. Then we’ll look at a strangely disturbing story from the life of Abraham along with the prophecies of Isaiah, as to how the sacrifice of a lamb foreshadows the work of the Messiah. Finally we will figure out what all this means to us.

Let’s begin with the Biblical law of **sacrifice**.

The Hebrew laws of sacrifice and atonement, mainly laid out in the book of Leviticus, describe how **one who had broken the law could be justified before God through a payment made by an intermediary or substitute; which was mainly done through the sacrificial death of a lamb, goat, or bull**. But these laws actually had their beginning with the original law-breaking of Adam and Eve, and the sacrifice offered in their behalf by God Himself.

When they did not physically die after eating the forbidden fruit, our first parents thought that perhaps they could escape God’s judgment. They did not know that in their disobedience they had immediately, spiritually, died – they had been separated from God – and that in breaking God’s law, they now owed a life penalty for their sins. Think of the traumatic lesson Adam and Eve learned about the cost of their disobedience while watching God take the lives of a substitute pair of animals instead, and then clothing them in the skin of those who had died in their place.

But why is any payment for any sin necessary? Couldn't God just ignore it and let both them and me go on living as if nothing had happened? No. Because God is a righteous God, to ignore sin without requiring the just penalty would make Him less than righteous; thus, our sin always demands retribution; as our Bible warns us, *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). But knowing this, in His mercy God created the law that a qualified voluntary substitute could pay that penalty for us.

Wait a minute! Did you just say a "**qualified voluntary substitute**" ???! All those lambs, goats and bulls sacrificed over the years never volunteered to do so!!

True. While they did not volunteer to do so, these animals would all still eventually die to provide us with food and clothing, so why not let their deaths also teach us a symbolic lesson: that the wages of sin is always death, but also that someday a volunteer might come along who could and would willingly pay that penalty for us. Who could have guessed that, as planned long before the foundation of the world, this qualified voluntary substitute would be God Himself: Jesus, the lamb of God.

So God set up a sacrificial system for the nation of Israel to keep this lesson of substitutionary atonement always before their minds. **Central to all the temple offerings was the daily sacrifice for the sins of the people of two perfect lambs, without any defect – symbolic of their qualification to be our sinless substitute.** Precisely at third hour (9AM) every single morning, before all the other burnt offerings of the day, with the sounding of a horn, the first lamb was sacrificed. Then at the ninth hour (3PM), as the horns again sounded, the day's offerings would end with the death of the last lamb (Exodus 29:38-42)..

Keep the timing of these two sacrifices in mind as we go on to think of another lamb sacrificed for another purpose:

The last plague inflicted upon Egypt was the death of every firstborn in the land; only through this deadly event would they finally be convinced to let God's people go. To protect the enslaved Hebrew people during this horrible plague God gave them the following instructions.

Late in the day, at twilight, the head of every household was to kill a lamb and paint its blood on the doorposts of their home. They were then to go inside to stay for the night, cooking and eating that lamb, prepared to travel, as the death angel passed over their homes. As they sat inside taking its meat into their bodies for nourishment, that lamb's blood, painted on their doorposts, was both protecting them from death and freeing them from slavery. From that day forward, God established the annual reenactment of this event as a perpetual celebration for the nation of Israel to remember the day that the blood of a lamb delivered them from death to a new life. (Exodus 12:13)

Think of both of these sacrificial events as we move on to see the prophetic significance of a strange and terrible test that God had put to Abraham.

Living childless for 75 years, Abraham then waited another 25 years for the fulfillment of God's promise to give him and Sarah a son. After the miraculous birth of Isaac, being their only heir to all of God's other promises, you can imagine Abraham's dismay when God next told him to sacrifice his son. (Genesis 22:1)

How could God ask Abraham for this sacrifice seeing that, with the giving of Law, He would specifically condemn those who followed such practices? (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-3; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10). But God never wanted Isaac's life, rather He only wanted to test Abraham's sometimes faltering faith; whether or not, now, Abraham would completely trust His promises.

The Bible records that Abraham passed this test because he was fully convinced God was able to do everything He had promised: thus, if Isaac died, God would bring him back to life in order to keep those promises God had made for him (Hebrews 11: 17-19). Isaac didn't die; instead God provided a substitute sacrifice in his place.

This is where this strange event becomes prophetic. As Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice up Mount Moriah, he asked his father, *where is the lamb for the sacrifice?* Abraham replied, *"God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son"* (Genesis 22:8).

More literally this verse reads, *"God will provide Himself a lamb."* You might say that Abraham's unknowing prophecy was that the coming Messiah would not only be the Lamb of God, but would be the Lord God Himself. Which is exactly who Jesus is.

Further connecting this event with the future death of Jesus, Mount Moriah, where Abraham had been told to go for this sacrifice, was the same place where the Hebrew Temple would later be built (2 Chronicles 3:1), and where Jesus, the Lamb of God, would die.

Now we come to Isaiah's prophecies about God's suffering servant; the only one qualified to be our voluntary substitute.

In probably one of the most beautiful and haunting passages in Scriptures, Isaiah describes how "the arm of the Lord," like a sacrificial lamb would willingly pay the price for all our sins.

He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53:3-7)

Now, traveling ahead in time to the last day in the life of Jesus, let's see how this prophecy was fulfilled by the one whom John the Baptizer named "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*"

On a Thursday evening, starting the day of preparation for Passover, Jesus ate an early Passover meal with His disciples – what we now call the Last Supper (Luke 27:7, John 13:1). Later that night He was arrested, dragged around to various sham trials, to eventually to stand silently, early in the morning, before Pilate, who then surrendered to the mob's wishes and ordered Him crucified.

After being flogged and beaten by soldiers, like Isaac carrying the wood for his own sacrifice, Jesus then carried a cross up to a promontory called Golgotha on the side of the mountain known as Moriah.

According to both Matthew and Mark's Gospel it was 9AM in the morning that Jesus was nailed to that cross and it was 3PM when he died. (Mark 15:25-34).

How could they have known what time of day it was?

Because while the nails were being driven through Jesus' hands, from the Temple you could hear the horns sounding for the first sacrificial lamb of the day. Then as the horns again sounded for the death of the second lamb, Jesus said, *Father into your hands I commend my spirit*, bowed His head and died (Mark 15:34).

For six hours, as personal offerings for sin were being made at the Temple, Jesus hung on the cross asking God's forgiveness for all our sins, and with the final offering, Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, died. Then at twilight, while all the people were killing their paschal lambs in preparation for the celebration, Jesus' body was being removed from the cross and as they went into their houses for the evening to dine, his body was being laid in a tomb.

In 2007, Pope Benedict 15th concluded that the evening before, as Jesus shared an early Passover meal with His disciples, no paschal lamb was served, because Jesus himself was the paschal lamb. Now you know what he meant, when Jesus broke the bread and passed around the cup saying, *take and eat, this is my body [soon to be] broken for you... take and drink, this is my blood [soon to be] shed for you.* Like that first Passover lamb of long ago, His shed blood now saves us from both death and frees us from our slavery to sin, to live a new life in the family of God.

So, when John called Jesus, "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,*" he was seeing, in the future event of Jesus death, **not one but two lambs:**

- Jesus as our qualified – sinless – voluntary substitute,” God’s own provided self-sacrifice, Isaiah’s silently suffering servant, the **perfect sacrificial lamb** who could finally pay for all the sins of the whole world
- and also Jesus our **Passover Lamb** whose shed blood protects us from death giving both life and freedom for all who take Him, His Holy Spirit – like the bread we eat and the lamb they ate – into our lives.

But to understand the whole story, we need to see one more image of the Lamb of God as recorded in our Bible. In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John looked forward in time to the end of our world and saw the Lamb of God once more.

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'

Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sing a new song:

'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.'

(Revelation 5:1-9)

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, the problem that has always faced humanity is the lethal nature of sin. Everyone has sinned and has fallen short of God’s holy and righteous standard for life. And the wages paid for our sin is death, both physical and spiritual (Romans 3:23,6:23).

God’s prescription was to freely offer forgiveness to all who would receive it through the substitutionary sacrifice of a lamb, but not just any lamb, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who volunteered His own life in payment for our sin.

Jesus came not as some great teacher bringing some new philosophy or religion, nor did He come as some great political leader to set people free from the oppressive rule of human governments and empires.

Instead Jesus came to bring atonement for our sin, to make us right with God, Restoring what we lost back in the Garden of Eden, something the Law could never provide. He came as "*the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world*" and to deliver all who by faith accept the offering of His own life payment, freeing them from their captivity to sin and death and assuring them of a new home into the Promised Land of heaven.

Let's think and pray about this as we again come to this Christian version of that ancient Passover meal, now remembering not our delivery from slavery in Egypt, but our delivery from slavery to sin and death.