

Behold the Lamb 2 Corinthians 5:21

INTRODUCTION

A lamb. When you look at a lamb, you likely see a cute, innocent little animal, don't you? I never had a pet lamb. Maybe you did.

- Mary had one. Its fleece was white as snow, and everywhere that Mary went, that lamb was sure to go.

Now imagine, if you will, you and your lamb are in Jerusalem in the year A.D. 30 (give or take a year or two). It is the Festival of the Passover. You are one person squeezed a crowd of one million pilgrims who have descended on this city for this important and mandatory Festival. One million people, milling around the streets of a city whose normal population was about 27,000 people.

Those one million people are accompanied by approximately 100,000 lambs. Maybe a few goats, too. The Law that governed their religious lives clearly required that they must have one or the other for the sacrifice that would happen as the focal point of the festival.

- The Law was very clear. The sacrifice needed to be either a lamb or goat. It had to be a male, one year old, and without blemish.
 - That last requirement is important. No blemishes. The lamb must be perfect.

The ritual prescribed by the Law was equally clear. When the time for sacrificing came, you would take your little lamb to the Temple. There you would place your hands on its head, recite the appropriate words, and hand the lamb over to the executioner.

- In so doing, your sins were transferred to that lamb, and that innocent little lamb took on your guilt and offered its life for your forgiveness.
- Don't miss this point either. Forgiveness happened because an innocent lamb took on the sins of the sinner.

Sin always has consequences, and the most severe of all of sin's consequences is death. We are probably familiar with the New Testament's way of stating it:

The wages of sin is death ... (Romans 6:23)

But the Old Testament is just as clear.

The one who sins is the one who will die. (Ezekiel 18:20)

But in His mercy, God provided another way. He provided a lamb. And in His great mercy, God decreed a principle we call "substitutionary atonement." That simply means the lamb can die instead of you. God proclaims the lamb to be a worthy substitute. The lamb dies and you are forgiven.

- The only flaw in the system is that the process needed to be repeated every year.
- But it is not really a flaw, because God designed that flaw so that people who wanted to be a right relationship with Him would grow weary of the annual sacrifice.
- It was a blessing to be forgiven, but it was a burden to know that forgiveness was only temporary.

So here's the formula:

An innocent lamb takes on the sin of the sinner so that the sinner can experience the forgiveness of God.

During this season of Lent, we are going to focus on a very special Lamb. His name is Jesus. John the Baptist introduces Him to us in John 1:29, our theme verse for the next seven weeks:

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)

This is the story of Lent, summed up on one simple verse. 13 words. But when you understand their meaning and apply that meaning to your life, those 13 words are powerful and redeeming.

John the Baptist spoke those words at the very beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus had not yet preached any sermons, told any parables, or performed any miracles. No disciples were following Him. No religious leaders were trying to silence Him. Not yet. All of that would come.

The whole ministry of John was designed to prepare the way for Jesus. To point people to Jesus. Look! Here He comes! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Our goal over these next seven weeks is to look closely at the Lamb of God, and to experience anew the wonder and power of His forgiveness. As we do, I believe our hearts will be ready to proclaim with great joy “He is risen!” on Easter Sunday.

The epistle lesson for today was written to a group of Christians in the city of Corinth who had lost their focus on Jesus. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, they were questioning key elements of the faith. They were focused on everything BUT Jesus. Every new idea, every new fad, every new popular preacher. But not Jesus.

So Paul – the writer – the man who had started the church a few years earlier – needed to call them back to Jesus. Behold the Lamb of God! He expressed it like this:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Let me share three insights from that verse.

INSIGHT #1: GOD MADE HIM WHO HAD NO SIN ...

God made him who had no sin ... (2 Corinthians 5:21)

It is hard for us to imagine a life without sin. Most people are very aware of their own sinful ways. But even if they would falsely see themselves as perfect, they cannot help but see the sin and evil in the world around them.

- Did you know that so far in 2023 there have been 88 mass shootings? I found that stat in Wikipedia. Today, February 22, is the 53rd day of this year. That averages about 1.67 shootings a day.
- Do you realize that the war in the Ukraine is a year old?

It is hard to imagine a world without sin, and to honestly admit that we are people without sin.

Yet, Jesus was sinless, and it is because Jesus was sinless that we have hope of an eternity in heaven. If Jesus were not sinless, there would be no Easter. He would simply be a man who told really good stories and did many good deeds.

- But the Bible makes it clear that through Jesus was tempted by sin just like we are, He never committed one.
- The apostle Peter stated it clearly:

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth. (1 Peter 2:22)

Like the lambs taken to the Temple during Passover, Jesus was without blemish.

INSIGHT #2: ... TO BE SIN FOR US ...

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us ... (2 Corinthians 5:21)

I wonder what it was like for Jesus to leave His home in heaven – where there is no sin – to come to earth – where sin abounds.

- I wonder what the Baby Jesus thought as He laid wrapped in swaddling cloths in that manger and saw the impact of sin all around Him.
- I wonder how His heart felt when He saw the people in Nazareth treated unjustly by their leaders – including religious leaders.
- I wonder what it felt like as they nailed Him to a cross and God placed on Him – the Lamb of God – the sins of all of humanity. Is it any wonder He cried out:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46)

But that is what happened. The One who personally had no experience with sin because the sacrificial lamb for all of us who only know sin.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us ... (2 Corinthians 5:21)

And here's the result

INSIGHT #3: ... SO THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

In Jesus – and in Jesus only – we find forgiveness of our sin.

There is a little gospel chorus that says it like this:

I had a debt I could not pay,
He paid the debt He did not owe.
I needed someone,
To wash my sins away.
And now I sing a brand-new song,
"Amazing grace" all day long,
Christ Jesus paid the debt,
That I could never pay.

But that's not all,
Christ lives in me,
I once was blind but now I see..
It pleased the Father
To reveal the Son in me,
That I become the same as He;
Christ now is being formed in me
Till all my death is swallowed up in victory.

APPLICATION

And that is the story of Lent.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world ... did just that.

Behold Him.

Amen.

