

Mar 24th 2013 John The Baptist #5 "Behold The Lamb" John 1:29-42

It happened early into the ministry of Jesus on a day when He was walking beside the river towards John the Baptizer. John saw Him coming and recognized Him as the one person whom he had baptized whose baptism had stood out as Divinely blessed. For John had heard the voice of God declaring about Jesus that day, "This is my son whom I love; with Him I am well pleased". And John had also seen the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Jesus. A sign that God the Father had given him to look out for, because when he saw it happen he would know that this one was the one whose way John was to prepare. This one was indeed the Son of God.

So in seeing Jesus coming John now knows that the day has arrived when He must declare who Jesus truly is so that others would follow Him and put their trust in Him. So he shouts out, **"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"**

And then he adds some amazing information about this one whom He knows to be the Son of God. ³⁰ ***He is the one I told you about when I said, "Someone else will come. He is greater than I am, because he was alive before I was born."***

In human terms John was born before Jesus. In terms of existence Jesus as God, was before the creation of the world. He knew no beginning did God the Son, and yet He allowed Himself to be imprisoned for a while in a world controlled by the tyranny of time, so that we humans could one day escape the growing old and the decaying of life forever. And He would do that by taking on human flesh and fronting up to death itself and defeating it on the cross.

That's why John did not cry out, "Look, the pre-existent God who is creator of all, and more powerful than any other force or person that anyone could ever think of or imagine." That would have been completed true but that announcement was not John's prime task. His mission was to proclaim what the Son of God had come into this world to be and do in order to rescue sinners. And that was to be the Lamb of God. The Lamb belonging to God. The Lamb provided by God. The Lamb who would take away the sin of the world.

For us the meaning of that expression, "Lamb of God", would not have been immediately obvious if we had been there listening to John. If he had said, "Look a carpenter, shepherd, priest" we would have understood.

Yet for every Jew present the meaning would have been clear and powerful. It was part of their culture. The connection of lamb with the taking away of sin meant sacrifice. They knew from childhood that God had made a way for them to have a temporary covering from the sins they committed against Him by offering a lamb as a sacrifice. That if they in sorrow brought their lamb and laid it on the altar, God would stay His hand of punishment. Yet they also knew that such a sacrifice had to be offered continuously, because it only held back God's anger against sin, it lacked the power to be a permanent solution. They could find for themselves no lamb that could do that.

But what if a Lamb were provided by God Himself? A lamb that was guaranteed to take away all the sin of the world; all punishment, all death, all eternal separation from God. What if anyone in the whole world could now come to God in sorrow because of the separation that sin has caused between them and Him, and point to the Lamb He provided as a sacrifice, and claim Him as their sacrifice? And know with certainty that such would give them complete purity and acceptance by God as His children. What an incredible thing that would be.

And here now was John the prophet pointing at Jesus and saying, Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And what would have made that thought even more astounding was the timing of John's declaration. For it seems from what follows later on in chapter 2 that John declared this just before the Passover feast that year. The feast that celebrated the most famous sacrificing of a lamb in Jewish history.

For it was the Passover feast that reminded the people of Israel of a time when God freed them from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. He had visited plague upon plague upon Pharaoh and his people, and the last plague was the one that caused the death of every firstborn in the land. Yet for God's people and for those foreigners who decided to follow God's instructions, there was a way of escape. They were to take a lamb and sacrifice it putting the blood on the lintels of their doorway, and when the angel of death passed over the land, no harm would befall those who trusted in the blood of that sacrifice for their protection from death. Then they would eat the lamb as sustenance for the journey to the land of promise that lay before them.

Was this Lamb of God then, that John proclaimed, the Lamb that the Passover Lamb had pointed to for centuries. The Lamb whose blood would save God's people from death again, but this time from eternal death by giving them eternal life?

Paul the Apostle knew for certain that it was and said so in 1 Corinthians 5:7

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

For Paul and the other NT writers was able to look back and see just how completely Jesus fulfilled the requirements of a Passover lamb.

For the Passover lamb had to be killed in such a fashion that no bones would be broken. John says in his gospel in 19:31-37

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," ³⁷ and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

The Passover Lamb had to be sacrificed on a particular day in the Passover feast and at a particular time. At the 9th hour or 3.00pm.

Jesus was crucified during the Passover feast and on that very day. And Luke tells us in his gospel in 23:44-46:-

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

In addition at the very moment the Passover lamb was offered up the Priest would make a loud sound on the shophar so that the people would hear and contemplate this sacrifice for their sins. And Jesus called out with a loud voice when He died, and in addition that mighty veil in the Temple that separated the people from God's presence was torn in two from the top to the bottom, for now that separation had been removed.

Then there was one other requirement for the Passover Lamb and it connects strongly with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

For the Passover Lamb had to be completely pure without any blemish whatsoever, and it had to be seen to be pure. For that purity suggested a sinless sacrifice and only a sinless sacrifice would suffice.

So it was specified that the Passover Lamb should be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem five days before the Friday when it would be sacrificed. And on those five days it would be subjected to intense scrutiny to make sure that it was absolutely pure.

So it was that on the first day of the week, being Sunday and also 5 days before the Friday of Passover, Jesus rode into Jerusalem. He took Himself as the Lamb of God to the Temple. From that moment on the Pharisees and the Scribes and the chief priests sought earnestly to find fault in Him, culminating on the Thursday night in His trial. But they could find no sin.

Pilate said of Jesus. I find no wrong in Him. The Centurion at the cross said. Surely this was an innocent man. Paul writing in 2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

When Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem the crowds cheered Him as their King. They thought that He came to be crowned. But although He was indeed King of Kings, He came not to battle with mighty weapons of war, but to give Himself as the sacrifice that would defeat sin and death for ever. He came to receive a crown of thorns, not a crown of gold. He rode in as The Lamb of God, destined to die that we might live.

It is that death we remember this Friday and I believe it is imperative for a Christian, if at all possible, to meet with others on that day and to recall again what it meant for the Saviour of all to die for them. For no one else has given their life for you as God the Son has. And no one else has gained for you through His death what he has gained. He is Jesus, God the Son, the Lamb of God. He deserves your honour. He deserves your love. He deserves your sacrifice. He deserves your life. Will you give it over to Him once more during this Easter season?

