

St. John 1:29, 35-38a

Dear Friends in Christ,

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us . . .

Those, of course, are some of the opening words from Charles Dickens' work, "A Tale of Two Cities" published in 1859. It is a historical novel about the plight of the French peasantry prior to the French Revolution. Sounds as if it was written this morning, doesn't it? But, then, if you take a look at history, you soon learn that humanity has never moved in a positive way for very long. There has never been and there will never be a heaven on this earth - that is, since our first parents were escorted out of the Garden.

However, we do not live in a state of abject pessimism. We live with God's love and direction. We are to . . .

BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD!

I. He Is the Lamb of God.

Our text is quite familiar. It begins, "The next day (John) saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" It's the opening words of that statement that must first hold our attention: "Behold, the Lamb of God...".

The basis for and importance of that statement are rooted in the Passover meal God instituted at the time of Moses, some 1500 years before Christ. Listen to some of the directions God gave to Moses from Exodus 12:

"Tell the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a **lamb** according their fathers' houses... Your lamb shall be without blemish...you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

"...they shall take some of the **blood** and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it... And when I see the blood, I will **pass over** you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt." (Ex. 12:3,5,6,7,13)

Around 800 years after Moses, God would give these words to the great prophet Isaiah concerning the First Coming of Christ,

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a **lamb** that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth...he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken **for the transgression of my people?**" (Is. 54:7,8b)

Significantly, prior to Jesus being led away for crucifixion - the slaughter - John writes in the 19th chapter of his Gospel: "Now it was the day of **Preparation of the Passover**. It was about the sixth hour. (Pilate) said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!'... So he delivered him over to be crucified." And just as significant are these words of the Apostle Paul: "For Christ, our **Passover lamb**, has been sacrificed." (I Cor. 5:7b)

Most of us are very familiar with all this. But the **reality** and **conflict** it brings upon this world and **comfort** for those who know Christ are vital for our understanding.

II. Who Takes Away Sin.

First, there's the reality. John says "who takes away the sin of the world!" Sin. Not sins. I find it important to note that John is talking about what infests all of humanity. Not simply specific sins, but the sin that leads to specific sins. Missing the mark. John writes in his first epistle, "...sin is lawlessness." And Paul underscores the reality, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

Secondly, there's the conflict. Paul writes, "...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." (I Cor. 1:23) It's the offense of the Cross that confronts all humanity - **stomps all over the arrogance** that insists humans are good enough to earn God's love - or, are good enough to live without God. **Stomps all over the mockery** that sees the Cross as ridiculous and unnecessary. **Stomps all over liberal churches** clamoring for more money and more people by side-stepping any real preaching of sin, corruption, death as a result, and hell as the final landing place - no need of a covering - blood - a Savior!

The world doesn't hate any other "religion". It hates Christianity. The fallen nature of man leaves no choice. Jesus said to His church, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil." (Jn. 7:7) Jesus said to those who know Him, love and follow Him and don't play with, alter or toy with His Word: "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you...If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (Jn. 15:19,20) And the most despised of words: "No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6) There is no other way to God! It's the greatest offense to this world; these words of Jesus: "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and **people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.**" (Jn.3:19)

Thirdly, there's the comfort. And it is wonderfully simple, as we listen to John's words: **The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**. Takes all our sin away! Gone! Forgiven. Removed - as far as the East is from the West. Forever!

But, finally, that is reserved only for those who believe. Well...you know..."For God so loved the world, that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16) And there's the further comfort of, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned..." (Jn. 3:18a)

III. So, What Are You Seeking?

Most of you are familiar with the term "agape". Biblically, it refers to the love of God for the unlovable. While we were sinners - enemies of God because of our sin - Christ died for us. And now, even though we still struggle with sin, for the sake of Jesus we are always forgiven.

In our text, two disciples of John heard John's words, "Behold, the Lamb of God!". Then follows this: "the two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus." And, then, comes the confrontation: "Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, 'What are you seeking?'" (vss. 37-38) You note that Jesus didn't ask, "Who are you seeking?" but "What?" Well, they were seeking "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin..."; the *agape*.

William Barclay wrote,

"The real meaning of *agape* is unconquerable benevolence. If we regard a person with *agape* (love them though they are as unlovable as we are) it means that nothing that that person can or will ever do will make us seek anything but his highest good." (*Daily Study Bible*, Ephesians, p. 164)

It was the Early Church Father Augustine who wrote,

Love has hands to help others. It has feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. This is what love looks like.

I know, it's not always the easiest thing for us to do: to love others as Christ loved and loves us. But His mercy, forgiveness and love are there for us every day. And, let's face it, in light of the things we think and say and do - in light of how we rationalize what should never be rationalized, the love of God is always there.

I know, I've put these words in front of you probably more times than imaginable. But I need to hear them and think on them daily. I don't believe you're any different. These words:

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

And get this: Since, as Paul says, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" and "...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..." (Rom. 5:8,10) - well, as we like to say, that changes everything.

Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away (our) sin!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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- I. He Is The Lamb of God.*
- II. Who Takes Away Sin.*
- III. So, What Are You Seeking?*

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