

Behold the Lamb

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[0:00] John 1, verse 29-34 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.

And John bore witness. I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remained, this is he who baptized with the Holy Spirit.

And I have seen and bore witness that this is the Son of God. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? And pray with me.

Let's pray. Lord God, we pray that now as we have heard your word read, that you would cause us through your Spirit to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[1:41] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. People will travel hundreds and thousands of miles, and they will pay hundreds and thousands of dollars simply to look at something.

Whether it be a priceless piece of art like the Mona Lisa, or a great architectural achievement like the Eiffel Tower, or the Statue of Liberty, or a natural wonder of the world like the Grand Canyon, or Mount Everest.

People will take time out of their lives to travel to where these things are located so that they can look at them and take pictures of them and come back home with these pictures and these experiences that they want to share with their friends and family and co-workers and whatnot. Other times we come across something that is strange or it's unique. It's something that we don't see. It doesn't happen every day.

And it happens and it captures our attention. And when that happens, we often look to those who are around us because we want them to see it too so that they can participate in this strange or unique thing that we're seeing together and that we can share this experience with one another.

[2:56] When I got to go to Latvia, we flew from Tulsa to Chicago. That was our first leg of the trip. And as we were flying in the plane over Chicago, I saw out of my window Wrigley Field where the Chicago Cubs play.

And if you know anything about baseball, that's a historic stadium. And so one of our, my friend and fellow pastor who was on the trip with me, he was sitting in front of me and I reached up and I tapped him and I said, look, look out your window.

And he automatically, you know, recognized it was Wrigley Field. And so for the next few minutes, we talked about Wrigley Field as it was in our window until it passed out of sight.

These are things that we do. We like to look at things. We like to share these experiences with one another. And so when we come to John chapter 1 verse 29, and we hear John the Baptist say, behold, and we see him beholding Jesus, that's often what we think is happening there.

But there's so much more going on there than we realize at first glance. When John says behold, that word in the Greek is *idaē*.

[4:12] And it's in the imperative mood, which means that this is a word that is being issued in the form of a command. John isn't nonchalantly saying something like, hey, look at that.

Look at that over there. That's kind of neat. No, he's commanding them to see what he sees. What is it that he wants them to behold?

It's the Lamb of God. But he doesn't want them to just look at Jesus. He wants them on a much deeper level than that to understand who Jesus is.

Because in that moment, he's just now for himself understanding who Jesus is. We know that this is the case because of the other instances in which this word, behold, *idaē*, is used by John the Apostle throughout the rest of his gospel.

He uses it two other times. The next time he uses it is in John chapter 16 verses 28 through 30. There Jesus is speaking with his disciples and he says, I came from the Father and have come into the world.

[5 : 23] And now I am leaving the world and going to the Father. His disciples said, ah, that word is *idaē*, ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech.

Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you. This is why we believe that you have come from God. So here it's used in our English word as ah, like aha, I understand now.

So what's happening here is that the disciples are beginning to understand more fully the person and the ministry of Christ and they are beginning to fully grasp this truth.

That is what they are beholding in this moment. I like books and I like movies that have a twist in the ending. And you know, if you are like that, if you are like me, when you are reading those books or you are watching that movie, you are trying to figure it out.

And you know, sometimes you figure it out before the twist is revealed. And it's that aha moment. Like, I got it. I figured it out. And I think that's kind of what is happening here with the disciples.

[6 : 29] It's an aha. I figured it out. Or like when you're trying to learn something difficult and you've been struggling to understand something for a while and maybe you had a good teacher or they used a good illustration or whatnot.

And this thing that was a puzzle in your mind, all of a sudden it clicks and it comes together. And it's that eureka moment. I figured it out. That is what is happening right there. So in one sense, this word is used to describe seeing with understanding for the first time.

However, it's also used in another way in John chapter 19, the third time and last time it's used, verses 4 through 5. Their pilot is speaking to the crowd that wants to crucify Jesus.

It says, Here that word is actually used in verse 4 and verse 5 for the word see and the word behold.

Now, Pilate obviously doesn't understand who Jesus truly is and neither does the crowd who wants them to be crucified. At that point, Pilate had Jesus beaten brutally and they had mocked him.

[7 : 48] And so what he was hoping there in this moment was that he would present Jesus to the crowd, that they would behold, that they would see that he has been beaten severely, that that would pacify them, though it would not.

So he presents Jesus to them beaten and mocked and ashamed. And he's hoping that they will see his suffering, behold his suffering and understand that he has suffered enough.

But ultimately, they don't understand and neither does Pilate. So I hope that you see that this word means more than simply calling attention to someone or calling attention to something.

It describes understanding something that you hadn't understood before. This has more to do with the mind than it does with the eye.

John beholds Jesus in verse 29 for the very first time. Yes, they were cousins. They had probably had some kind of interaction before this moment with each other.

[8 : 51] We don't know for sure. But it's at this moment that John fully understands who Jesus is and he wants everyone else who is in with an earshot of his voice to see what he sees and to understand what he understands, that Jesus is the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world.

And that little statement is jam-packed with great spiritual truth that I want you to fully understand. I want you to understand it.

I want to understand it just as much as John understood it in that moment when he beheld Jesus, the Lamb of God, who came to take away the sins of the world. So here's the main idea for this morning's message.

Beholding the Lamb of God means understanding who Jesus truly is and what Jesus has truly done. And understanding this truth will bring transformation to your entire life.

Now I understand that's a loaded statement there in that main idea, but I absolutely mean it. If you understand who Jesus truly is, you'll never, ever be the same.

[10:09] The way you view sin, the way you view success, the way you view suffering will be completely different than the way you'd seen those things before. The pursuits and the values and the treasures of your life will be completely different than what they were before.

You'll know a satisfaction that cannot be matched by anything else and a hope that can never be lost or taken away. And so this sermon is going to be a little bit different from most sermons that I preach because most of the time that I'm going to spend upon is going to be on verse 29 and then once we've done that, we'll move quickly through verses 30 and 34.

But I want you to see and understand again what John saw and understood in that moment when for him it clicked in his mind. He beheld Jesus as more than just a man, as more than just the carpenter's son, but as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

And so in order to behold that, we need to go back to the Old Testament and begin to follow the story of the Lamb that runs all the way throughout the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

And there are three parts to this story of the Lamb that we must behold. First, beholding the Lamb means understanding that your sin has incurred a debt with God.

[11:43] Beholding the Lamb to truly understand means that you understand that your sin has incurred a debt with God. You can't truly understand what it means for Jesus to be the Lamb of God until you first understand the debt of your own sin.

The Old Testament book of Exodus chronicles God saving His people from slavery and bringing them out of that land of oppression into the land that He had promised to Abraham, their forefather.

And so God, if you remember that story, He sends Moses to Egypt to act as the one who will mediate between Him and His people who will deliver them from their enslavement.

And so Moses goes and he speaks with Pharaoh and he commands Pharaoh on God's behalf saying, let the people of God go. Pharaoh says what?

No. Who is your God? That He's greater than our gods or any other God that I should listen to Him. And so you know the rest of the story that God sends plagues upon the Egyptian people and still Pharaoh hardens his heart.

[12:55] He will not let God's people go until finally we get to the final plague which is the last and final blow. And I want to read that passage with you.

Exodus 12, verses 1-13. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, This month shall be for you the beginning of months.

It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their father's houses.

A lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons, according to what each can eat. You shall make your count for the lamb.

Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male, a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. And 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.

[13:58] Then they shall take from the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of their houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that night roasted on the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

They shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted its head with its legs and inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning.

Anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner, you shall eat it with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand.

And you shall eat it in haste. It's the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night. I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast.

And on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments. I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you.

[14:58] And no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. And then in verse 23, For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians.

And when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your house to strike you.

So here we see that God is going to execute His judgment. The great destroyer would pass through that land and only those who took cover under the blood of the Lamb would be saved.

Now if you hear that for the first time, it might sound strange to you. Part of what sounds strange to me is why a lamb? You know? I would think a lion would seem to be more sufficient, right? A lion has power. A lion is strong. Or a tiger. Or something like that. Why a lamb? A lamb is a meek creature. It is a mild creature.

[15 : 59] But God says in effect, the only way you are going to be able to face this great destroying force of judgment is through that meek, mild lamb and its blood.

And you're eating it as a family and then again using its blood to cover your doorposts. To the modern mind, this doesn't seem to make sense. And in fact, it may even seem offensive. But it begins to make sense when we better understand the culture and times in which this event occurred and the significance that the lamb has in the rest of Scripture.

And so we're going to go back even further before Exodus 12 to Genesis chapter 22. And there it's Abraham and he receives a message from God. He is to take his son, the son of the promise, the son whom he loves dearly, and he is to sacrifice him, his son Isaac.

Now there's something that we need to understand here first. Ancient Hebrew culture was not like modern American culture. Our culture celebrates individuality and encourages individual success.

[17 : 14] Now I'm not saying that that's always wrong, but it's different than back then. Back then, their primary concern was not at all for themselves, but for the family.

The family. The success of the family was primary for everybody in the family. They wanted most not for themselves to succeed, but they wanted most for their family to succeed.

They wanted to bring honor not to their name, but to the name that their family shared. If you acted shamefully back then, it was a poor reflection on your family, and the family was held responsible for whatever you may have done to bring shame to your community or to the family or whatnot.

That's not the way it works here in our times. Right? If my sisters did something wrong and they were to go to jail or something like that, you know, my response would be, well, you know, I love them, but I didn't do it.

It's not my fault. That's the way we think, which is just different from the way that they understood things. And we also understand, though, even though we do live in an individualistic kind of culture, that even still we realize how important a person's family is to their upbringing.

[18 : 34] For example, unfortunately, in our time, we have seen a lot of mass shootings, a lot of school shootings, and it's teenagers who are the ones pulling the trigger.

And it's horrific and it's sad, but you know, we can't help but think when that happens, who are the parents of this child? What did they do or not do in better raising them that maybe this could have been prevented?

You see, we do it too. Ancient people thought about the family over themselves and especially the firstborn son of every family was very, very important.

He was the heir. He would receive the lion's share of everything. All the hopes of the family would be primarily directed, embodied in that firstborn son.

He would be the one who would one day assume responsibility for all the rest of them. And so his success was so important because his success meant their success. His job was to lead them.

[19 : 45] His job was to protect them. Their future was tied up into this one very important person. And so over and over again in the book of Exodus and then in the book of Numbers, God sent a message to his people that the life of every firstborn son of their families was his.

It belonged to him unless they redeemed it. So every year, every family would put up a certain amount of shekels to redeem their firstborn son's back.

It was the price of redemption. If they didn't pay that price, the life of the firstborn son would be forfeited, the law of Moses said. So now again, to us living in a different age and a different time, we don't quite understand the need or significance of any of this.

But to those who lived back then, they fully and completely understood it. God was sending an unmistakable message to them that every family on the face of the earth and every single person owed a debt to him.

It was a debt for their sin, for their disobedience. And their firstborn sons were liable for the way the rest of the family was living, for their sins.

[21 : 11] And so Abraham, when he receives this message from God, he would have known and understood all of this. He realized that God wasn't acting unjustly. He knew that every family owed a debt of sin and God was now calling in his debt.

God was doing something that Abraham understood he had a right to do. Isaac, Abraham's beloved son, would die for Abraham's sins.

That's how he knew and understood it. And if you've read that passage before, you understand that never once did Abraham ever accuse God of being unjust for what he had asked him to do.

And if he went, but I want to say that it wasn't as if he didn't struggle with this at all though. It wasn't as if Abraham went into Isaac's tent one morning and was like, hey buddy, I got some bad news.

We got to go on a little trip and I'm going to kill you. It wasn't like anything like that. Yes, of course this was a mighty struggle for Abraham and here's what I think he was struggling with most.

[22 : 26] Not with God being unjust but trying to reconcile God who he knew was just with a God whom he knew was also gracious. How can he be just and gracious?

That was the struggle. God had promised Abraham that he'd do great things through Isaac and his descendants afterwards. So he would be struggling with trying to understand how could God fulfill this promise to me and yet call in this debt that I owe?

How could he be both just and justifier to those who trust in him? How could he do this and still keep his promise to me? And so the emotional peak of this story comes in Genesis 22 verses 7 and 8.

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, my father, Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

So they went both of them together. So what Abraham is saying here is, my son, I hope with all my being that you don't have to die for my sins.

[23 : 43] But even if that happens, I trust in God. And there is so much more going on here than meets the eye.

Hebrews 11, 17-19, we understand more of what was going on in Abraham's heart. by faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.

And he who had received the promises was in the act of offering his only son, of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named. He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

To many, however, this price seems too steep. And God seems too unfair. Even some might accuse him of being a monster for asking for such a thing.

And they wonder why God can't just forgive the debt without extracting any kind of payment, especially such a high payment. Well, he can't.

[24 : 51] God can't just forgive a debt without a payment. And so please, think about this with me. If someone really, really hurts you, if they really, really wronged you, what happens?

There's like a debt between you and that person isn't there. There's something there between you that's affecting your relationship. It can't be ignored. It can't be wished away.

It is a very real thing. It is a debt. And there's only two ways, really, to get rid of a debt like that.

First, you could pay it down yourself, which often means excluding that person, or you pay it for them, which means you exclude that person, you hurt that person for what they did to you.

You use words to inflict pain upon that person, or even something worse. you make them pay for their debt. Or, secondly, you can forgive them, which means instead of paying that person back, you pay for the debt yourself.

Let me help you understand what I mean by that. Say, for example, we've found a man who's truly guilty of a horrendous crime. He's a serial rapist and a serial murderer.

[26 : 15] And say, he goes to trial and the judge says to everyone, well, you know what? Yeah, he did some really bad things, but he said he's sorry and I really believe that he means it, and so I'm going to let him go free.

There would be outrage, wouldn't there? There would be outrage because we would feel what? Like a debt had not been paid. A debt wasn't paid towards the victims and the families whom he mistreated and whom he hurt and whom he killed.

We would feel as a society that a debt wasn't paid to us either. Because we would think, hey, if people can do these things and there's no deterrent for doing such things, then eventually we're going to pay for that as a society.

It's going to hurt ourselves, it's going to hurt our children. The Bible says that there is no such thing as a real spiritual wrong that can be forgiven without a real payment.

Hebrews 9 22, Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. So here we see God says very clearly, someone must bear the pain.

[27 : 27] Someone must pay the price. Using that example, if we can sense the moral outrage of letting a person go like that who has been a serial murderer and whatnot, we could understand or just in a little sense how much more God must understand and be outraged at the sins that we commit against Him.

And so, going back to Abraham, you've got to understand that he is well aware of this. He understands that God created us to live for Him, but that we don't. He understands that God tells us that we should love our neighbors, but we don't.

None of us lives as we should, and so all of us have a debt to God. That he is just to call in.

However, at the last moment, as Abraham's about to bring the knife down upon his son, his beloved son, God stops him and points him over to a thicket where caught within it is a ram, a male lamb.

And it's been provided by God to take the place of Isaac, Abraham's beloved son. Its life will be given in place of Isaac's.

So, beholding the lamb means understanding that your sin has incurred a debt with God. Romans 3.23 says it so plainly and clearly, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[29 : 06] So, the next part of the story of the lamb is this. Beholding the lamb means understanding that God has provided a substitute to pay your debt.

He's provided a substitute to pay your debt. So, again, remember back to God's instruction for the Israelites during that final plague in Egypt. That night in every house, there was either going to be a dead son or there was going to be a dead lamb.

The lamb received what the son deserved. The lamb paid the debt for the family as its substitute for its son. Every Hebrew son that night in Egypt would have looked at that dinner table and seen that lamb and understood that I'm alive because that lamb is dead.

God is communicating to them that there is a debt, but that there could be a substitute who could pay that debt for them.

However, he's also showing them and preparing them with knowledge to understand that though that lamb would give its life to spare them that night from judgment, it ultimately could not provide them with the ultimate deliverance that they needed.

[30 : 25] So they'd continue to offer these sacrifices, these lambs. They would continue to celebrate Passover from generation to generation.

Now as important as that Passover lamb was, a more important sacrifice they understood had to be provided in order for them to be completely delivered, in order for them to have their sins completely paid for.

And so on the eve of Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion, he sat down to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. Do you remember that? Mark 26, 26-29, this is Jesus, and he's sharing this meal with his disciples.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took the bread, he was presiding over this meal. And after blessing it, he broke it and he gave it to the disciples and said, take, eat, this is my body.

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, drink it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

[31 : 33] I tell you that I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom. So look, all of the elements prescribed by God for the Passover were present at this meal, except for one.

You notice that? the bread is present, the wine is present, but there's no lamb. As Jesus provides over that meal with his disciples, he stands up, and instead of speaking of that bread as being the bread of their affliction while they were slaves in Egypt, he says, now this bread is my body, broken for you.

He's saying to them, now it's my suffering, now it's my affliction, now it's my body, now it's my body, my blood that's going to be the ultimate liberation for you.

I'm going to stand in your place. I'm going to face the destroying judgment for your sin. I'm going to set you free from your bondage to sin and death.

I'm going to pay your debt. The lamb was at the table. Jesus was that lamb. The lamb of God.

[33:03] Like Abraham, God the Father would likewise walk with his son up another mountain. His beloved son.

Like Abraham, he would lay his son on the wood. God's But this time, there was nobody to say stop.

There was no other sacrifice capable of taking upon our sins and bearing our guilt and enduring our punishment.

And so the ultimate beloved son on the cross cries out to his father, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And God, the father who loves his son is silent. He paid the price in silence as his son paid the price in his body, in anguish in his soul for us.

[34:21] So beholding the lamb means understanding that God has provided a substitute to pay your debt. And that substitute is Jesus Christ. And then thirdly, understanding and beholding the debt of your sin and the substitute, we see that beholding the lamb brings life transformation.

And so in the rest of verse 30 and 34, not that John's life wasn't transformed before, but he is so excited about what he has beheld, what has been revealed to him. He can't help but burst out in praise, in witness.

This is he whom I said, after me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed to Israel.

And John bore witness. I've seen the spirit descend from heaven like a dove and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, he whom you see the spirit descend and remain.

This is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and bore witness that this is the Son of God. He's excited, as we should be too.

[35:43] John didn't know any of this until it was God who revealed it to him. It was God who revealed this to him and then he beheld it. Everything clicked.

It was Jesus. John's ministry. John's purpose. Everything came together. And man, he rejoiced.

And he couldn't help but bear witness. My purpose. What I've come to do. God has fulfilled his promise. What God has said throughout all of his word about this lamb who would come.

God has fulfilled his promise. He's here. The lamb of God. And he's going to take away our sins.

Forever. And ever. And so likewise, those of us who have experienced that same thing when we were saved by God, revealing to us that Jesus Christ is the lamb of God, so too from that moment and every moment forward, we should be bearing the same kind of joyful witness.

Jesus commanding others. Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We don't say, hey, try out Jesus.

[37:01] I think he could help. No, we say like John, look. Would you look? Will you see? Can you understand that Jesus is the lamb of God?

Trust in him. And so the transformation that comes when you behold the lamb is first. That beholding the lamb transform your understanding of sin. You understand that sin isn't just a little thing to wink at, but that it's damning.

And it's only because of Christ our lamb that we are able to be saved from it because he endured our hell and our place for our sins on the cross. It's not a little thing.

Beholding the lamb transforms your understanding of success. success. You live your life to give instead of to get. Man, and that's what I hope and I think was communicated yesterday to those who came in our community that we are here to serve because we have received the greatest gift that anybody could ever receive and we hope that they will receive it too.

And so we don't spend our lives trying to seek to acquire things that will serve us. No, but wanting to be used by God to serve and glorifying him for the one who paid it all for us.

[38:15] And then thirdly, beholding the lamb transform your understanding of suffering. You understand that the only truly innocent person who ever lived suffered in a way you'll never have to experience.

And his great suffering brought about the greatest good. And so Christianity is a lot like an eternal Passover meal.

As a church, this morning, later on, even when the teens get together for our pool party, anytime we gather together, we are partaking of the lamb with one another.

Fellowshipping with one another. Bearing one another's burdens. Engaging, enlightening, encouraging, and equipping one another. Each time we gather and we meet, we behold the lamb of God together.

And like John the Baptist, we bear witness to one another and with each other that others may come into our fellowship and do the same. Beholding the lamb of God.

[39 : 26] Participating, partaking of the lamb of God together. And so beholding the lamb will transform the way you think about others, your sin, success, and your suffering.

Thank you.