

## **Teaching 1: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”**

The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” [John 1.29]

*“The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”*

*For us, the concept of a sacrificial lamb perhaps means very little. But John’s Jewish audience would have been taken to the daily sacrifices in the Temple.*

*Every day in the Temple, morning and evening, the priest sacrificed an unblemished lamb - a practice that went back to the time of Moses, when the offerings were made at the entrance to the tent of meeting and the Lord said:*

*“There I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory. ... Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.”*[Exodus 29.38-46]

*Day after day, the priests by their sacrifices attempted to cleanse the Temple so that it would be fit for God to dwell there. In reality, of course, as the author of Hebrews said, these daily sacrifices could never take away sins.*

*But they gave us a hint - a foretaste - of what Jesus, by his one perfect sacrifice, would achieve. His sacrifice has made us fit to be temples for God to indwell. He has washed us clean, so that God’s holy and life-giving Spirit can fill us and transform us. We need only to invite him.*

*John’s listeners may have been taken, too, to the annual sacrifice of atonement.*

*Every year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place in the Temple and sprinkle it with the blood of a sacrificial goat, to make atonement for the sins of the Israelites. After that, he would confess over a live goat all the wickedness and rebellion of the people, laying his hands on its head to put all their sins on it, before sending it away into the wilderness as a sign that God, in his mercy, had removed the sins of the people far from them.*

*In reality, of course, as the author of Hebrews explained, all of this was only a kind of earthly copy or shadow of heavenly realities.*

It was necessary for the earthly reproductions of heavenly realities to be purified by such methods, but the actual heavenly things could only be made pure in God’s sight by higher sacrifices than these.

Christ ... entered Heaven itself to make his appearance before God as High Priest on our behalf.

[Hebrews 9.23-4]

*For, although*

all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

[Romans 3.23]

*God in his great mercy*

presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood

[Romans 3.25]

*with the result that*

He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

[Psalm 103.12]

*There is nothing that we ourselves can do to achieve this. But Jesus, by his one perfect sacrifice, has enabled God to set aside our sins and forgive us. We need only to ask him.*

***John's disciples may even have been taken to the original sacrifice of the covenant between God and his people - when, having received the word and law of God, Moses set up an altar and made sacrifices to the Lord.***

Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey."

Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." [Exodus 24.3-8]

***The blood sealed the covenant - the agreement - between God and his people. The life of the animal was believed to reside in its blood, and so the sprinkling of its blood on both parties to a covenant meant that they were bound together by the life of the sacrificial victim, in a covenant relationship that could not be broken.***

***Now we know that this was the blood of the old covenant. As Jeremiah later prophesied:***

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah ... I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts ... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." [Jeremiah 31.31-4]

***And of course it was this new covenant that Jesus sealed on the night he was betrayed:***

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." [Matthew 26.26-8]

***Christ's sacrifice enables us to be in an everlasting relationship with God. We need only to choose to enter into it.***

***Finally, John's audience would almost certainly have gone straight to the annual sacrifice to commemorate the Passover, when***

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "... Tell the whole community that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household ... Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs ... On the same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgement on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you ...

And on that very day the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt. [from Exodus 12]

***The Passover lamb was sacrificed so that by the covering of its blood the Israelites would be protected from God's judgement. And that very day, God delivered them from slavery. He freed them to live a new life in the land he was giving them.***

***And all of it an earthly shadow of the heavenly reality that was to come. For now indeed Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*** [1 Corinthians 5.7]

***We have been redeemed from an empty way of life***

with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. [1 Peter 1.18-9]

***And we are free to live our lives as God intended us to live them; free of our sins; free to be what God made us to be. We need only to have the courage to trust him to be with us as we step out in faith.***

*“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”*

*By his perfect sacrifice on the cross:*

*Jesus washes us clean, so that God’s Holy Spirit can indwell us - if we invite him;*

*he removes our sins from us, so that God can forgive us - if we ask him;*

*he offers us a relationship with God as our Father - if we choose to accept it;*

*and he frees us to be all that God has made us to be - if we trust him to help us.*

*Behold - the Lamb of God.*

**LISTEN TO MUSIC BEFORE QUIET SPACE:**

**ROBIN MARK - “BEHOLD THE LAMB”**

## Teaching 2: “God himself will provide the lamb.”

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

<sup>2</sup> Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

<sup>3</sup> Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. <sup>5</sup> He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

[Genesis 22.1-5]

*When Abram was 75 years old, God called him to leave his home and his family and go - he didn't know where. Some time later, God promised him an heir - and descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.*

*For many of his 75 years, Abram must have longed for a child. For the next 25 years, he lived with the promise of a child. His dearest wish, his heart's desire, his hope against all hope ... until at last his precious son was born. And now, in the few short years of Isaac's childhood, he had at last known what it was like to be given the desire of his heart. There were no descendants yet - Isaac wasn't old enough for that - but Abraham had had a glimpse, a taste, of what it might be like for his wildest dreams to come true.*

*And now God was asking him to give it up. To obey God meant to put aside his own deepest desire, the thing that he had been promised and for which he had waited in faith, hoping against all hope - and that he had now received, and experienced for himself in all of its indescribable joy.*

*And in order to give it up, the action he must take was the most painful that it is possible to imagine. To obey God meant to kill his own son: to do the thing that would cause him the most pain in all the world.*

*To give up the deepest desire of his heart, and to do that which would hurt him most. That's what God was asking of him.*

And the two of them went on together.

<sup>9</sup> When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. [Genesis 22.8-9]

*Make no mistake about this: Abraham was about to sacrifice his beloved son. He gathered all the things that would be needed, and he took his son, and he travelled for three days in the knowledge of what he would have to do at the end of their journey together. He bound him, and he laid him on the altar, and he reached out his hand for the knife.*

*Now - we know what happens next. We know that*

<sup>11</sup> the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

<sup>12</sup> “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

***But Abraham did not know that this would happen. All he knew was what God had asked him to do. And he trusted God enough to obey him, even though it made no sense. He stood at that altar and reached for that knife because he trusted God even though it made no sense. And by that act of faith, by the biggest sacrifice that he was capable of making - as Abraham made himself completely open and vulnerable to God - it was as if he created an opening between heaven and earth - an opening through which God could work.***

<sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup> and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

[Genesis 22.15-8]

***Somehow, by his faithful obedience, Abraham made it possible for God’s will to be done. Somehow, from the altar of Abraham’s sacrifice flowed the river of God’s blessings for his people:***

“... because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ... all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

***In obeying God, Abraham made God king and thus brought his kingdom to earth.***

***Absolute obedience comes from absolute trust, and Abraham trusted completely in God’s goodness and provision. Through years of heartache and disappointed hope, pain and anger, he had experienced God’s mercy and guidance and encouragement. It had not been a straightforward journey for Abraham, and he had at times got things horribly wrong. But by now he had come to a place of absolute trust in God.***

***I missed a bit of the story.***

<sup>6</sup> Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, <sup>7</sup> Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

<sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”

[Genesis 22.6-8]

***“God himself will provide the lamb.”***

***And indeed, once the angel had spoken:***

<sup>13</sup> Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide.

*There is no doubt that Abraham had passed God's test. He was obedient to God and withheld nothing from him. God asked him to give up that which was most precious to him in all the world, and to accept that which was the most painful to him in all the world, and Abraham said yes. And yet, at the crucial moment, as Abraham reached for the knife, God stepped in. God himself provided the lamb. God himself provided what was needed for Abraham's sacrifice.*

*Which is what God always does.*

*The big picture is that*

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [John 3.16]

*In Jesus, God provided the lamb who takes away the sin of the world. What we cannot achieve by ourselves, God does for us: putting aside our sins, cleansing us, freeing us and bringing us into a relationship with him as our Father. On the cross, God himself provided the lamb. The Son went through death and separation from the Father, so that we don't have to.*

*And the littler picture is the same. God will always provide all that we need to do what he asks us to do. We may be called, at times, to sacrifice that which means the most to us. We may be required, at times, to live through that which causes us the most pain. But in the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, we have two promises.*

*The first is that our obedience makes God king of these situations and opens the way for his kingdom to come. Through our obedience, God's blessings can flow.*

*The second is that God himself will provide the lamb. When we say yes to him and really mean it - when we do what he is asking us to do - that's when we find that Jesus himself is doing it for us. As we take his yoke upon us, we find that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.*

*There are times when we do not believe this. Perhaps all of us have known situations in our lives that have gone on for so long, or are so very difficult, that we become so angry with God that we cannot bear the thought of proclaiming his goodness. Perhaps we all have times when we tell God that it's not fair, and we fix our eyes on the pain or the injustice or on what we're being asked to give up.*

*And yet, when we fix our eyes instead on Jesus - when we put on the belt of truth about God's goodness - when we declare with Abraham that the Lord will provide; and with Paul that in all things God works for our good; and with Jeremiah that God's plans are to prosper us and not to harm us - when we trust God enough to obey him, that's when we experience for ourselves his miraculous provision. That's when we are able to proclaim God's immeasurable goodness.*

*It is as if we were being asked to throw ourselves down from a great height - and then, when we do it, God himself reaches out to bring us safely to the ground.*

*But we do need to throw ourselves down.*

*This is not about us testing God, as Jesus was tempted to do in the wilderness, but is rather about our response to God when he tests our obedience, as he tested Abraham's.*

*Have we really beheld the lamb of God? Do we really know and believe in our hearts that God himself has provided the lamb - and that he will always provide the lamb?*