

It was all pointing to this!

This is one of those sermons that you only do while reading through the Bible. We have been reading Chronologically through the Bible this year. We spent a good part of the year in the **pre-Jesus part** called the Old Testament. I used to think that the O.T was a **group of disconnected stories** told about God and Israel, but it wasn't terribly important because now we have Jesus. **But what we have learned is that the Bible is one coherent story of narrative about God's involvement** with people, his highest creation.

Today is one of those days when we hopefully get to see this big picture story, moving from Genesis to where we are as **Jesus is arrested, beaten, murdered, and rises** from the grave. **Because the story was, all the time, pointing to this.** Something is **coming to a head** that started all the way back in Genesis, the beginning. **The puzzle pieces** started falling together into something coherent. **It's a picture God has been creating from the very beginning.**

We are going to **start with a verse that wasn't from this week's reading.** But **it has an image** that we will follow from the beginning to Jesus' death and resurrection.

²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "**Look! The Lamb of God** who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me who is **far greater than I am**, for he **existed long before me.**' ³¹I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel." **Keep in mind, Jesus is his cousin.** Their moms were pregnant at the same time. **John knows Jesus, his relative from Nazareth,** son of Joseph, the carpenter. **He didn't recognize him at first,** but now he knows that his ministry of calling people to repent and return to God and be baptized is about Jesus. **It all points to this moment when John says, "Look..."** ³²Then John testified, "**I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove** from heaven and resting upon him. ³³**I didn't know he was the one,** but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, '**The one on whom you see the Spirit descend** and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the **Chosen One of God."** **Lamb of God and now Chosen One of God...Messiah.** ³⁵The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. ³⁶As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, "Look! There is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷When John's two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸Jesus looked around and saw them following. "What do you want?" he asked them. They replied, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" ³⁹"Come and see," he said. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day. John 1:29-39

"I once asked a mature adult believer why Jesus was called the "lamb of God and was told, "Because Jesus is gentle and nice." NIV Application Commentary on John

Yes, lambs have the reputation of being gentle and nice. You don't think of **lambs as being aggressive.** People don't own **guard lambs,** they have guard dogs. There aren't pockets of **illegal lamb fighting rings** in rural Michigan. **Mothers aren't telling their kids' stories** about how they should be leery of lambs because they might just attack. **I'm thinking lamb on people crime is low.**

You didn't see commercials for political candidates saying, "If elected, I will be like a little lamb when I get into office. Vote for me for **your next prosecuting attorney."**

But yes, this person is wrong. There is a **connection between lambs and what Jesus is doing** as he goes to the cross that **starts centuries before** Jesus is born. It's baked into the story from the get-go. **Therefore, we need to come up with a better answer then, "Because Jesus is gentle and nice."** What did John the Baptist mean by lamb of God? We need to answer this question...What does it mean for Jesus to be the lamb of God?

First, I will contend that those Hebrew people, hearing this from John, would have **had a pretty good idea** of what this image of a lamb from God would mean.

Like I said, **it's from the beginning of the Bible, but it's also written about Jesus after his death, resurrection, and ascension.** ¹⁸For you know that God **paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors.** And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless **Lamb of God.** ²⁰God **chose him as your ransom long before the world began,** but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake. 1 Peter 1:18-20

We have words like "ransom", payment in the blood of Christ, connected with the **"spotless Lamb of God."** We will get into all of that in good time, but first I want to focus on verse 20 and that phrase, **"God chose him as your ransom long before the world began."**

This isn't some random or accidental comparison between Jesus Messiah and lambs. This is **on purpose.** God is intentional from the beginning.

This will become obvious when we read verses from Genesis, Isaiah, the prophet and 1 Peter which we just read. This imagery is all through the Bible. **God wants us to see Jesus as a lamb. Why?**

What does it mean for Jesus to be the lamb of God? God is **intentional from the beginning of his story and covenant** with Abraham and his descendants. **The second part is...**The Lamb is our **deliverer** from the guilt of sin...

As people, **we don't have an answer to our sin problem.** This is where **the sacrificial system came in** where they would sacrifice a lamb, among other things, to God **because they were sinful people.**

We are asking people to tell us what we missed in preaching so that we can hit it in January, in a series we are calling, **"The Cutting Room Floor."** But already there has been an outcry from the people, **"Pastor Bill, we want more Leviticus.** We can't get enough of that book in the Bible with **all its rules about washing,** and of course **cutting up animals and roasting them on an altar** so that God will forgive their sins."

Therefore, the people have spoken, and I have heard. Here's some Leviticus. ¹⁷"Suppose you sin by violating one of the Lord's commands. Even if you are unaware of what you have done, **you are guilty and will be punished for your sin.** ¹⁸For a **guilt offering,** you must bring to the priest your

own **ram with no defects**, or you may buy one of equal value. Through this process **the priest will purify you from your unintentional sin, making you right with the Lord**, and you will be forgiven. ¹⁹**This is a guilt offering, for you have been guilty of an offense against the Lord.”** Leviticus 5:17-19

From the beginning the lamb/sheep is used as a payment for sin so that the people can be in relationship with this holy, good God, even though they are sinful.

This is very clear about who is guilty, anyone who sins against God, whether they are conscious of it. If one of these people was **sleepwalking and they ended up at Molasses** downtown and enjoyed a pulled pork sandwich, they were guilty of breaking kosher laws. **It’s not about feeling guilty, it’s the state of being guilty.**

The Lamb is our **deliverer** from the guilt of sin...Which means I am responsible for my sin, period. **It’s got my name on it. I must own it first.** It’s like the kid I heard about from another Church of God in Columbus, Ohio. **This kid decided to live a different kind of life** and he robbed some sort of business in Florida, cleaning out the cash registers. The problem is that **he dropped his hat** and his mom, when he was at home, had written his name on the inside of the hat. **Easiest bust those cops ever made.**

...And liable for its judgment. Elsewhere in Leviticus this oft-repeated expression **“bear sin”** (NIV) consistently connotes **responsibility for sin and liability to judgment.**

One of the resources I read (The Gospel Coalition) put it this way. “The killing of the animal thus signifies the divine judgment that sin merits. The symbolism of laying hands on the sacrificial animal, confessing sin, and then the ritual slaughter of the animal, therefore, conveys the idea of deliverance by substitution. Forgiveness is secured by substitutional sacrifice. Finally, the repeated assurance that the sacrifice was a “pleasing aroma to the Lord” symbolizes God’s satisfaction with the sacrifice and acceptance of the sinner.”

Back to the idea of ransom. We know what a ransom is. That’s when **someone is kidnapped** from a wealthy family, and they demand millions of dollars before they release the captive. **Now it’s popular for people to capture all of someone’s data** from their computers and demand money or they will destroy it or sell it to the highest bidder. Your **valuable personal information and cat videos** are returned to you for a price.

So, what value does God put on getting us back from our captor, sin? We were **worth Jesus**, the lamb of God. **God’s best for us.**

Listen to the words of Isaiah in one of his prophecies that is clearly **about the coming messiah** many years before Jesus was born. **Notice how it combines what we know happened to Jesus and this image of a sacrificial lamb.** He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was **led like a lamb to the slaughter.** And as a **sheep is silent before the shearers**, he **did not open his mouth.** ⁸**Unjustly condemned**, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. But he was **struck down for the rebellion of my people.** ⁹He had **done no wrong** and had never deceived anyone. But he was

buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave. ¹⁰ But it was the Lord's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his **life is made an offering for sin**, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the Lord's good plan will prosper in his hands. Isaiah 53:7-10

Here's more about him being sinless, guiltless, or without defect. And his death is for those who have rebelled against God and gone their own way. **He is an offering for their sin of rebellion.** This is saying that the ransom is for someone who **actively went against the wishes of the one who is paying for their release.** Let that settle in. It wasn't about that **sleepwalking Jew with barbeque sauce on his pillow.** It's about **someone who rebelled against God.** They weren't just **guilty of accidentally breaking a kosher law, but full-on fighting against God.**

That's why Paul writes, "For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. Romans 5:10

The lamb is a ransom payment for the release of a captive, and it is also the payment for sin. The lamb in both cases is payment. Listen to this. This happens **before that stuff in Leviticus,** before the sacrificial system was set up. ⁶ So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, ⁷ Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" ⁸ "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together. Genesis 22:6-8

This is very early in the Bible, and it is already understood that sacrificing a lamb or sheep is what God expects and deserves. **It is a demonstration of their allegiance and recognition that he is holy.** Why is this? God decreed that the sacrifice was necessary because he is just...

If a judge lets someone go free for murder just because he **feels sorry for that person,** or is in a particularly good mood that day, what does that do?

#1. The judge will then be **open to criticism if he doesn't do it again.**

#2. **What was expected from people is no longer seen as serious.** If I let someone slide because the judge feels sorry, **then that law has just been weakened.** It must **not be very important to the smooth operation** of society. Thou shalt not murder isn't crucial anymore. **It's like the highway speed limits once you get north of Clare,** they are a suggestion.

#3. **This means that the judge is no longer just and if the judge isn't just, then he/she is no longer a judge** because making fair judgments is the purpose of a judge.

If God doesn't decree that sin, disobedience to God must be judged and condemned, then what happens? "The wages of sin is death." If he **lets sin go, then he must let it go all the time** and then people can say, **"We don't have to listen to you because you are not worthy or fit to pass judgment** on me or anyone. You are a **corrupt judge** that makes his judgments based upon something other than what the law says.

That doesn't sound like the kind of God I want to follow, and it doesn't sound like Jesus. That's because God's justice is only half of the picture. Not only has, **"God decreed that the sacrifice was necessary because he is just...**and provided the sacrificial substitute because he is gracious.

This is not an either-or situation. It is a **both-and situation.** We think in terms of the **"just" part being inflexible.** Why, because **sin convinces you that you have the right to do what you want.** But **hypocritically, in the next breath, we call God unfair because there are consequences to sin in the world, like sickness and death.**

God is gracious because instead of ignoring his own rules, he provides a way for the penalty to be paid. The **traffic ticket, the fine, the jail term, and the death penalty** has been paid. **The record has been expunged, no longer to be brought back against us.**

Therefore, this satisfied his justice and his grace/love.

He was our ransom, from what we deserved our substitute, the life of the lamb as a trade for our lives. **Issac's life was saved because God provided a sheep caught in the thicket. The lives of the people were saved by the regular sacrifice of lambs in the temple.**

If you remember, in the Old Testament when the people were traveling with **the visible presence and power** of God in the form of smoke and fire. **God lived in their midst in this tent, called the tabernacle,** where his presence rested. **It was within the camp of these people who could not seem to remain faithful to him.** His goodness, and righteousness was **like the power of the sun.** It can bring light and warmth, but if too close, what is good will destroy you. **These sacrifices allowed them to have God in their midst and still survive.**

This was so we can be in relationship with a holy, righteous God. **Because Jesus is the lamb who satisfies God's justice and mercy, we can be in an intimate relationship that we are truly not up to. He's out of our league.**

The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.
Romans 8:3

The reason people are separated from God, sin has been surgically removed like a cancerous tumor. It's not a **bandage that needs to be replaced** on a wound that won't heal.

But it's even better than that. The power of sin's eternal punishment is broken as well as its power to determine what our lives are like here on earth. It is **"an end to sin's control over us."** **We can now live differently than when that lamb needed to be sacrificed over and over, year after year.**

What do we mean by Jesus is the lamb? The lamb is our **deliverer** from bondage.

It's not just deliverance from sin and punishment, it's deliverance into freedom to live the life he intended us to live from the beginning. **It's not about sin management and limping off into eternity.** That is the **old system,** where we must **rinse and repeat** these sacrifices to satisfy God's justice and mercy.

Deliverance is a pattern in the whole story. Let's walk through all fits together in the story of God's involvement with people. It all comes to this point with Jesus, but how did we get here where Jesus is the lamb?

1. **Before the Israelites leave Egypt, God gives Moses the instructions for the first Passover.**
2. A **lamb or goat without blemish was chosen** by the head of each family. It is killed, roasted, and eaten. This lamb was accepted as a substitute for the first born of each family.
3. The blood of each **lamb was put on the doorposts** of the home of each family. The death angel sees the substitute.
4. The **first born of the Egyptians** families dies.
5. **God's power is revealed, and the people are liberated.**
6. The **Passover is established as an annual celebration to remind the next generations** of what God has done for them through the lamb.
7. **They celebrate the second Passover** before entering the land of promise.
8. Under **Joshua's leadership, the Passover is celebrated.**
9. Then **hundreds of years pass without a Passover** celebration until the time when the kingdom is divided. **King Hezekiah** invites the people of both Israel and Judah to come to celebrate in Jerusalem.
10. **2 Kings refers to a gap** in celebrating from the time of the judges until **King Josiah** brought it back after reading the lost book of the laws of Moses.
11. Because of their **"loss of Passover memory"** (1102 Chronological Bible) God allows them to lose their homeland and be taken into **captivity in Babylon.**
12. After returning **70 years later the Passover celebration continues** through the silent period between the old and new testaments. **But because it is inadequate, it must happen each year.** Something better is needed.
13. **John the Baptist recognizes Jesus as the Passover lamb** and yet the people, particularly their leaders, miss the coming of their Passover lamb. Caiaphas even prophecies that it is better for one to die for the people than the whole nation. (John 18:14)
14. **Jesus is found to be innocent; he has no defects.** Jesus' declaration, **"it is finished"** concludes that this is once for everyone all time.

All these continual sacrifices to satisfy God's justice and mercy come to an end in Jesus. That's why Jesus said these words...It is finished, (and finished here means) completed.

It wasn't finished when they left Egypt...when they began **sacrificing lambs in the tabernacle** in the wilderness...when the **first temple was finished** and sacrifice happened...when **the second temple was built...**when **Jesus was born...**when **Jesus brought Lazarus out of the**

grave... It was finished when Jesus took our place on the cross, raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, sending the Holy Spirit to live within us.

Everything else is simply a response to these events. Do we allow Jesus to satisfy God's justice and mercy by accepting that when he did this for me "it was finished." Now I have freedom from punishment and freedom from bondage of sin. Sin doesn't determine my destination or the way I live for Him until then.

So, what does this have to do with how we are to live now? Peter explains. ²¹**For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering,** just as Christ suffered for you. **He is your example,** and you must follow in his steps. ²²He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. ²³He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. ²⁴**He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right.** By his wounds you are healed. ²⁵Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls. 1 Peter 2:21-25

We don't try to pay him back by doing good things. We live like Jesus because of what he did for us. **He died so now we can die to self and serve others.**

Now everything comes full circle and we are the sheep. We are sheep sent out among wolves to give our lives for our neighbor and for The Kingdom.

Step of Obedience. **Did you notice** that I usually say, "Steps of Obedience". No, that **isn't an error**. In this case, there's **only one legitimate step** to obeying Jesus as the lamb. That is giving your all to him. **It is giving him your past, present, and future.** You offer all of that like a lamb as sacrifice to him. It's what is called "**a living sacrifice**" in Romans 12. **We have a word for that.** Sometimes we limit this word to. as my friend Kim says, "four songs on Sunday."

Your step of obedience and my step of obedience is to...Worship the lamb who is worthy. And I don't just mean the song we are about to sing. The lamb deserves that we offer our everything to him.