

On the Lamb 12-17-06

Last week we went through the Bible on a whirlwind tour of the lineage of Jesus. We saw that the promises God gave in the Garden to have the seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent were miraculously fulfilled in ways man could never imagine. We followed the prophetic clues right down to the little clan that settled in Nazareth, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the murder of all the baby boys by Herod and finally the cross. And God still kept His word in a way that even Satan did not imagine. Satan's head was crushed even as he bruised the heel of the seed of Eve, Jesus, our Redeemer.

We skipped over 99% of the prophetic details about the Messiah, where He would minister, what He would do, how and when He would die. That could be a whole sermon series. But today I want to take you down another path from Genesis to the cross. We have been looking at the trees in Genesis, and this is a great time of year to step back and look at the forest. We are going to follow the journey of the theme of the lamb right through the book of Revelation.

It starts in the 3rd chapter of Genesis. Satan tempted Eve to disobey God, and chapter 3 verses 6 and 7 read, *6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

Then skip down to verse 21. *The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.* Adam and Eve had sewn fig leaves together in an attempt to cover their shame, but God had something more permanent in mind. The Scriptures do not tell us what animals God took the life of to provide those skins, but I would suppose it was that of lambs. You will see why as we continue. This whole idea of the shedding of blood for another is known as atonement. It literally means to cover, and in this case to cover sin.

What was God teaching? Don't for a minute think that God was just acting arbitrarily. I debated several liberal pastors in our city on this very topic. They could not see how a loving God would require blood for sin. Liberal seminaries today are teaching their students that this whole idea of blood for sin was a barbaric ancient ritual that was carried over by the Jews into the cross of Jesus. "Jesus' blood wasn't really shed for us," they teach. "He was just demonstrating that we should not use violence to oppose violence." But what does the Bible teach?

One man recently told me, "A loving God would never require the death of His son to deal with sins. We only need to repent, change to a positive direction." Let me explain what is wrong with that ideology. First, it totally contradicts God's word. Jesus, Himself, said that He came to give His life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28) (Mark 10:45) Jesus was a Jew. He believed the Old Testament, often quoting from it as source of ultimate truth. Reject this idea of atonement and you reject the very

Commented [notes1]: 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
Matt 20:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
Mark 10:45 (NIV)

belief that Jesus is truth. (John 14:6) Reject atonement and you reject the Bible as authoritative and Jesus as divine.

Commented [notes3]: 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 (NIV)

Once you've done that you can make any claim you like. The man I was talking to had another source of truth, his local prophet and the book he wrote. You see, if you reject the Bible as corrupted and distorted, then you have to find another source of truth, or make yourself as the sole arbitrator of truth for you. (Psalm 119:118) Lets look at those alternatives. (Joshua 1:8)

Commented [notes4]: 118 You reject all who stray from your decrees, for their deceitfulness is in vain. Psalms 119:118 (NIV)

If one claims another truth source, they should be honest about the fact that they think their truth source is more valid than eyewitness' accounts of Jesus' life. Most other truth sources do have an opinion about Jesus, and they discount atonement. They should be challenged as to why their source is more valid than the ones written by the men Jesus chose. If He was so wise, couldn't he choose someone that would convey His message correctly? Or was Jesus a poor judge of character? Some belief systems just won't follow through with the implications of their logic.

Commented [notes5]: Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Josh 1:8 (NIV)

The Bible is in more languages and soon to be in every language. If there is a sovereign God who loves mankind and wants them to know Him, wouldn't He cause His revelation to be the most circulated book? (John 3:16) Or would He just reveal his truth to some little cult in Sedona? Or just to people of a certain language group. (Many Muslims claim the Koran can only be truly understood in Arabic.)

Commented [notes6]: 16 "For 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 (NIV)

If you are the sole arbitrator of truth for yourself, your truth will contradict anyone else's truth, which means that one or both of you is wrong. Of course you can redefine the word, "true". Then there is no objective truth and all truth is subjective. Follow that logic and you end up with nothing that is really true. We need a source of truth.

Last week a feminist was upset about the way some of the movie stars have been portraying women. She was saying that women need a standard. Newsflash! We already have one. Their organization just doesn't like it. They threw away all standards, and now they realize that doesn't work either. So now they want to make up new standards. Maybe someone needs to tell them they need to go back to the standards that they rejected, the standard of God's eternal unchanging word.

All that to say that the world has clung to the wonderful concept of substitutionary atonement for thousands of years, and suddenly we got to smart for that belief. Here is the real problem. We have decided that our sin isn't that bad. Most honest people won't deny that there is sin, so to make our obligation as small as possible, they have decided that just saying "sorry" is enough.

I think what God was trying to teach Adam and Eve was that sin is more serious than we could imagine. He told them it would kill them! "*You shall surely die!*" The first animal deaths they witnessed were those killed by God to provide the skins to cover them. Jesus was right in line with this attitude when He said that "if your hand tempts you cut it off. It is better to enter into life without a hand than to have two hands and be thrown into the fire." (Matthew 5:29,30) In other words, sin merits hell. That's pretty serious. He also said that to be angry with your brother was like murder.

Commented [notes7]: 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. Matt 5:29-30 (NIV)

(Matthew 5:22) To look with lust is the same as adultery. (Matthew 5:28) What is with the Holy Trinity that they take such a serious approach to sin? They know what it means! We gloss it over; they shine a spotlight on it and show it for all the ugliness that it is in reality.

So when someone says that a loving Father wouldn't require blood, I say, "Says who?" You? Your guru? And when a soldier or police officer gives their lifeblood to save another do you call it barbaric? If I push you out of the way of a train and am killed by that train, there is going to be a lot of blood. Ewwww! Barbaric! Sin places us in a much more deadly path than an oncoming train! Sin is more serious than we think and therefore requires life that is represented by blood. (Leviticus 17:11)

That brings us to the next lamb story. ³ *In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.* ⁴ *But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,* ⁵ *but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.* Genesis 4:3-5 (NIV) Cain and Able brought their sacrifices at the appointed time. Cain brought the fruit of his hard work, the crops of the field. To Cain, sin wasn't a big deal. Just say, "Sorry God." Throw Him an offering. Abel brought the fat of his lambs. That's bloody. That required a death. God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice. Why? I think Abel saw the seriousness of sin. He learned how God had covered his parents' shame, and he knew blood was required to cover sin. Abel believed in atonement. Cain believed in his own good works.

Let's move forward into the Patriarchal period. At 100 years of age, Abraham finally had that son of promise, the bearer of the seed. God told Abraham to take His son to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him. Abraham didn't realize it, but God was testing him. Early the next morning Abraham loaded the donkey and set off for the location God had told him of.

⁴ *On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.* ⁵ *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."* ⁶ *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,* ⁷ *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?" ⁸ *Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."*... Genesis 22:4-8 (NIV)

Abraham believed God's promise. He had such faith that he thought if the boy died, God would raise him to life again. On the way up the mountain, Isaac asked his dad where the sacrifice was. Abraham prophetically answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." The angel of the Lord stopped Abraham as he was about to lower the knife, and nearby, caught in a thicket, was a ram. Another translation has Abraham answering, "God will provide himself the lamb." The covering for sin would be provided by God, Himself.

Move forward in time about 500 years. The Children of Israel are in captivity in Egypt. A deliverer had come, Moses. The night that God was going to take the life of the

Commented [notes8]: 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Matt 5:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matt 5:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

Lev 17:11 (NIV)

firstborn of Egypt, He told Moses what to do. ³ *Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.* ⁴ *If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat.* ⁵ *The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.* ⁶ *Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.* ⁷ *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.* Exodus 12:3-7 (NIV) ¹³ *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. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.* Exodus 12:13 (NIV)

Redemption and deliverance came through blood. Is the God of the Old Testament just an out of date blood thirsty God? Or is He still trying to teach mankind that deliverance from the slavery of sin is so serious that it requires a life?

As those delivered Jews started their wilderness wandering, God met with Moses on Sinai and gave him directions for a tent of worship. Every morning and every afternoon, a lamb was to be offered as a burnt offering. (Exodus 29:38,39) The priest would take an unblemished lamb and with the sharpest of instruments slit its jugular. The blood would be sprinkled at the base of the altar. (Leviticus 1:11) Why? ¹¹ *For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.* Leviticus 17:11 (NIV) God gave us blood for atonement. There it is just as clear as can be. Yet the author of Hebrews tells us that it's not possible that the animal blood could cover sin. (Hebrews 10:4) It is only a picture of the blood of the sinless One that was to come. Barbaric or Biblical? It depends on how serious you think sin is and your source for truth. Is it up to you or to God to decide what is required to make you right with Him? If I sin against you, can I decide what will make me right with you or is it up to you to decide? All sin is a sin against God, and He is the One that must decide what is required to make things right between us.

Some of the same people that say that all you need to do to be forgiven of sin is to say you are sorry are the same people that will not forgive others when they say they are sorry. They give them no opportunity to make things right, and yet they have decided that all God needs is a simple, "Oops, sorry."

Jump forward in time about 1500 years. Through most of that time, the daily sacrifices both morning and evening had been offered. Lamb after lamb after lamb had its blood sprinkled on the altar, not to mention the lamb for every family on Passovers and special offerings. Millions of lambs had been raised and rivers of blood had flowed, all declaring that sin is serious and the cost of atonement is great.

The last 400 years was without a prophetic voice. Then in Bethlehem near the fields in which shepherds grazed their flocks, Mary had a little lamb in, of all places, a stable. They may have been surrounded with other lambs. As this little lamb, Jesus, grew to a

Commented [notes11]: 38 "This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old.
39 Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight.
Ex 29:38-39 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 11 He is to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides.
Lev 1:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
Heb 10:4 (NIV)

man, a cousin of His cried out in the wilderness that it was time to repent and be baptized. His name was John the Baptist. ²⁹ *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."* John 1:29,34 (NIV)

John had said, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* The lamb God provided for a covering to Adam and Eve, the lamb of Abel's offering, the lamb of Passover and the lamb that the Levite priest offered, were all a picture of the Lamb that had finally come. This is the lamb that Abraham said God would provide.

He was lamb like. Isaiah prophesied, ² *He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;* Isaiah 42:2-3 (NIV) And when the final Passover of His life came He laid his life down as a sacrificial lamb for us. Listen again to how Isaiah said it 600 years before it happened. ⁷ *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.* Isaiah 53:7 (NIV) Isaiah said He was led like a what? A lamb to the slaughter! At any time He could have called for angelic back up, but he came to be the ransom for our sins, to pay the debt we could not pay, because justice for sin is a life. (Romans 6:23)

Here is how the author of Hebrews put it: ¹⁷ *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.* Hebrews 2:17 (NIV) He came to give His life to cover your sins and mine. He had no sins of His own, so He could take our place. I can't take your place. A lamb can't take my place. It had to be man like us, only sinless, the Lamb of God.

Now hear how the Apostle Peter described it. ¹⁸ *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.* 1 Peter 1:18-19 (NIV)

And in case you didn't think this was a theme that God intended from beginning to end, lets go to the book of Revelation. That great marriage feast with Jesus is described there. Listen to how John puts it. ⁹ *Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."* Revelation 19:9 (NIV) And in the very last chapter what are we going to do for eternity? ³ *No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.* Revelation 22:3-4 (NIV)

It's not an antiquated God that required blood, it is a holy God that knows the seriousness of sin. Realizing we could never pay the debt with our own blood He sent His only Son who willingly went to the cross to shed His blood as atonement for our sins. (John 10:18) Like Abraham with Isaac, God knew that His Lamb, Jesus, would be raised from the dead. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Commented [notes14]: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."
John 10:18 (NIV)

(Revelation 13:8b) Atonement isn't just an old idea, it's an eternal truth. Thank God for it. Cherish it, for by it you can have peace with God. Mary had a little lamb, whose fleece was white as snow. He came to pay a debt for us, pay all that we did owe, So that our fleece could be like His, as bright and white as snow.