

“Lamb of God”
John 1:29
Lent Midweek II
February 28, 2024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The text for our entire Lenten midweek meditation: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week, we began our Lenten midweek meditation of this historic, central, all-encompassing proclamation by focusing on that first word, “Behold!” – ἰδὲ! Behold, for what John the forerunner points you to is sudden, unexpected... perhaps because of time’s passing, but certainly because we sinners don’t deserve such grace, and yet – here it is! Here is the Lord’s promise to save us, and that promise is now flesh-and-blood in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

But, of course, John does not say, “Behold, *Jesus of Nazareth*, who takes away the sin of the world.” Rather, he says, “Behold, *the Lamb of God*, who takes away the sin of the world.” In this moment, the title and description is more important than the name. Not that the name is not important! Do we not agree with the apostle that there is no other name under heaven by which we are to be saved? Do we not cherish and treasure that name, and isn’t it glorious beyond all glory... so that “at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue

confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”? Yes, of course, the name is to be praised, honored, cherished forever.

And yet, John appeals not to the name, but to the title and descriptor of who this Jesus is. In fact, John doesn’t even use what we might call the more dominant (even more long-anticipated) title, “Christ/Messiah” – the title which has been given and anticipated since the garden of Eden when *One* was appointed, *One* was chosen (hence, “Christ, Messiah, Anointed One”), *One* was promised to crush the serpent’s head and win the victory of our salvation. Yes, we would wonder why John doesn’t say, “Behold, the Christ!”, as John’s own disciples made the connection, saying to their friends and brothers, “We have found the Messiah!” But instead, John says, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” So, let’s consider the depth of that title – “the Lamb of God.”

Understandably, the first word we latch onto is the word “Lamb,” but it shouldn’t be. The first word we notice *should* be the definite article “the.” Whatever this whole title means, whatever it describes, there is only one; the title is *exclusive* to this *One* to whom John points. This is no common object – one of many that fits a generic overarching theme or description – but it is the *only* one! See it now; notice it now; behold it now, cling to it forever. For, there is none other like it to succeed it, supplement it, or supplant it. This is *the* Lamb of God, the one and only of whatever that title “Lamb of

God” means. And, since it is so unique in all of history, it behooves us to appreciate the title all the more.

The “Lamb”, as we know, is an image that brings to mind the central act of worship in all of Israel’s history – the altar of sacrifice, the attempt of the faithful to bring their best and to offer unspotted, unblemished, perfect sacrifices to God... *at God’s command, no less!* Yes, God said, “Provide lambs – male lambs – perfect, spotless, unblemished male lambs from among your flocks. Bring Me your best and finest and sacrifice them on the altar.” And, of course, we recall that this goes all the way back to the night of the Passover – “Quick,” the Lord exhorted, “slaughter the spotless lamb, cover your households with its blood, and death will pass over you, and I will deliver you from your bondage.” Yes, we *recall* that... but, if we only *recall* that, we may make the mistake of only focusing on an image of God’s deliverance, of His salvation, of His promise. For that, could we not also use the image and the term, “Christ – the one chosen, by God’s promise, to save and deliver His people”?

But, this title is more than an image of salvation and deliverance. You see, even moreso than the term “Christ/Anointed,” the term “Lamb of God” focuses on two wonderful truths: (1) a substitute for sin, a substitute for death; and (2) suffering. Each of those may be *implied* in the title, Christ (anointed/chosen), but how many there are who will gladly say they believe in Jesus Christ and turn that title into a title of glory and kingship, a theology of glory

and even an earthly reign. But the title, “Lamb of God” cannot ‘get past’ or forget the altar of sacrifice, the altar of substitutional death. The lamb’s entire Scriptural purpose and meaning is wrapped up in that altar of substitutional sacrifice, beginning even before the Passover, all the way back to Abraham and Isaac: “Father, behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (the offering commanded by and pleasing to the Lord). And Abraham’s response: “God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering.” Yes, God himself provides the substitutionary sacrifice for the offering He commanded, the offering that pleased Him unto justification and righteousness.

It's breathtaking to consider, isn't it, how intimately wrapped into the title is the description of the substitutionary sacrifice to be slain, to suffer for the sake of the people. Again, we must acknowledge, not even the title “Messiah, Christ” so fully paints that picture as does the image of “the Lamb” (Even the great picture of the eternal throne room that speaks of the Lamb in glory upon his throne says that he stands looking ‘as though he *had* once been slain.’)

The Scriptures may speak of God’s people as His *sheep* (Jesus himself charges Peter to “feed my lambs”), and our hymns and children’s songs can speak of His little ones as His *lambs* (and we can understand that in the sense of *the* Lamb being the substitute for us who *should* have paid the price), but – *Scripturally* speaking – every

time we hear that term “Lamb” in the Scriptures – it ties us right back to those two divinely wonderful truths: (1) a substitute for sin and death; and (2) the suffering the substitute bears on our behalf. How does the prophet proclaim it 700 years before Jesus’ saving march to the cross? “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.”

But, why does that term and title tie us back to that substitute? Because of the other phrase of the term: “the Lamb of God.” Interestingly, in that second phrase of the term, it’s not really the word “God” on which we ought meditate (are we even really *capable* of properly meditating upon ‘God’?), but the little word “of.” What does it mean that this Lamb, *the* Lamb, is “of” God?

In the Greek, that term can mean “belonging to,” “from the source of,” even “of the substance of.” And, of course, in this case, it is (in a sense) “all of the above.” *The* Lamb that is the central image of all of history belongs to God (so that He is laid upon the altar by God himself), is “from God”, so that His mission and purpose is to do the Father’s divine will, and is “of the substance of God,” so that His substitutionary sacrifice is holy, perfect, righteous, divine.

Consider how deep was your sin, that the Lamb for which Isaac asked his *earthly* father had to – 2000 years later – be provided by the *heavenly* Father. No ram caught in a thicket by its horns, regardless of how unblemished, even how divinely-provided, would

suffice to be your substitute; no spotless lamb among the tens of thousands offered on the tabernacle/temple altar of sacrifice throughout the generations would atone for your sin. Your sin was so deep, there was only One, only One Lamb with head crowned with thorns, *the* Lamb, that could be chosen and anointed to be your sin-bearer. Yes, consider how deep is your sin, that there could only be *the* Lamb to pay for your sin.

And yet, as deep as your sin is that it required so much, even deeper still is God's love, that He provided so much. Yes, as the phrase says, "the Lamb *of God*." He provided what He required... because He knew that He required what only He could provide. It's as if He said in the Old Covenant, "You, My people: Provide for me your spotless, your unblemished, your best...because I will give you My best. Your salvation requires My best." Not because the righteous requirement of His holiness was too *steep*, but because your unholiness was too *deep*... too deep for you, or for any lamb you offered in your stead, to atone for sin.

But the One whose head was crowned with thorns, because He was unblemished before God, because He was sent by God, because He was *from* and substantively *of* God... that One crowned with thorns would and did atone for your sin and was your substitute. He did carry out the purpose intended in that title "Lamb *of God*" ... He did his Father's bidding, as the hymn says: "the holy Lamb undaunted came to God's own altar lit with flame; while

weeping angels hid their eyes, this priest became a sacrifice.” But, not just *a* sacrifice... *the* sacrifice. *The* sacrifice to cancel your sin, my sin, the whole world’s sin.

And that exclusive nature and purpose and mission – as testified to in both those little words of the title, “*the Lamb of God*” – that *exclusivity* was certainly not lost on God... but rather, to *His* glory the Lamb is to be praised. Have you ever thought of that? – when we praise Jesus for his wondrous redemptive work, we do not only praise the Son, but the Father who sent Him in accord with that perfect, divine plan... sent Him as *the* Christ, *the Lamb of God*. Notice how St Paul speaks of that glory that belongs to God and that right praise of God whenever we acknowledge in faith the salvation He secured through His promised Christ now fulfilled in history. Paul says, “That at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus is Christ is Lord *to the glory of God the Father.*” And, of course, Paul’s on good ground, because he echoes Jesus himself, who said of His suffering and death, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You.”

Thus, the Lamb of God – having completed His sacrifice and atoned for sins – brings glory *to God*. Yes, it is to the whole Trinity’s glory that the throne room scene in Revelation says that the Lamb stood in the midst of the throne, standing as though He had been slain, and all praised Him... and, by praising Him, thus also praised the Father and the Spirit. How do the hosts of angels and myriads of

myriads of the faithful around the throne and the living creature and the elders of heaven sing it? – “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” And *then*, the refrain: “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” – yes, *the* Lamb of God, so that both He who sits on the throne *and* the Lamb are praised – “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

Or, as we sing in the hymnody, “At *the* Lamb’s high feast we sing praise to our victorious King.” And *then*, the doxological conclusion:

“Father, who the crown shall give,
Savior, by whose death we live,
Spirit, guide through all our days:
Three in One, Your Name we praise. Alleluia!”

Yes, even during Lent, we ought realize that, in Christian freedom, the Alleluias may be sung...especially on Sundays, which are not counted in the 40 days of Lent. (Go ahead, try it out, count on the calendar... those Sundays are not part of Lent, but are to be a reprieve from our Lenten observance.) So, in Christian freedom those Alleluias *could* be sung even during Lent, precisely because they are to be sung forevermore because the Lamb of God came on the scene and accomplished what only *the* Lamb of God could accomplish. But, He did accomplish it – *the* substitute for *the*

sacrifice – for us men and for our salvation, to the glory of God and to be lauded and cherished at the Lamb's High Feast forever.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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February 28, 2024