

December 6, 2015

Advent Lamb of God

Exodus 12:1 – 13

John 1:29

These four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas are a time of remembrance and preparation and waiting. Advent is a season of remembering the coming of Christ the first time, and a season of preparation for His second coming. Advent symbolizes the present situation of the church in these last days, as God's people prepare themselves and wait for the return of Christ in glory to consummate his eternal kingdom. It also reflects the ancient longing of Israel at the end of the Old Testament: in exile, waiting and hoping in prayerful expectation for the coming of the Messiah. Israel looked back to God's past gracious actions on their behalf in leading them out of Egypt in the Exodus, and on this basis they called for God once again to act for them. In the same way, the church, during Advent, looks back upon Christ's coming to a stable in Bethlehem in joyful celebration, while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the return of Christ when He comes for his people. In fact church historians tell us that early church gatherings always ended with a cry of 'Maranatha!' which means 'Come, Lord Jesus!'

You can hear the strains of Advent all through Scripture, the longing for a Savior, and the prediction of His coming. We heard it last week in the prophecy of the seed of the woman. It was the first promise of redemption for a world terminally infected by sin and the promise of a Savior who would set everything to rights. It is here that the first Advent was born – the long anticipation of waiting for the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent and whose heel in turn would be bruised on a cross of wood outside Jerusalem thousands of years later. We hear the music of Advent in the words of Moses in Deuteronomy: *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to Him you shall listen—"*¹ We hear it in the writings of the prophets, like Isaiah: *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*² We hear it in the words of Malachi: *"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts."*³ All the way through the Bible there is the sense of anticipation of the coming of a Savior.

And when we get to the New Testament we hear it in the words of the woman who met Jesus at the well: *"I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things."*⁴ And we hear it in the cry of John the Baptist: *'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'*.⁵ And it is this Advent cry we are looking at this morning – ***Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*** From the very beginning the coming of the perfect Lamb of God who would atone for the sin of the world has been a major theme in the Bible. When Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden after the Fall, the Bible says that God made coverings of skin and clothed them. In other words, an animal was sacrificed and blood was shed so that their blood was not. It doesn't say what exactly that animal was, but we can infer from the verses that follow directly that it was probably a lamb, just like Abel sacrificed to the Lord in the next chapter.

A little further along in Genesis, we get to the story of Abraham, and again a lamb is involved when Abraham is ordered to sacrifice his only son Isaac. And instead of Isaac being slaughtered, God Himself provides a lamb as a substitute. And then we come to the passage we read this morning in Exodus, the institution of the Passover celebration. And right in the center of the story is a lamb: *Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.* Exodus 12:3

1 Deuteronomy 18:15 ESV

2 Isaiah 7:14 ESV

3 Malachi 3:1 ESV

4 John 4:25 ESV

5 John 1:29 ESV

You are probably familiar with the story leading up to chapter 12, but in case you're not, here's a short summary. God's people had been enslaved by an evil ruler in Egypt, forced to work for him and do his bidding for four hundred years or so. But God never intended to leave them there and at the right time raised up a deliverer, a man named Moses, to lead His people out of Egypt into the promised land. Through a series of plagues, the power of God is put on display to Pharaoh, but he refuses to let the people go. Finally, a last plague is announced in chapter 11 – the death of the firstborn. *"Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle."*⁶ Notice here that God does not limit the judgment to the Egyptians – 'every firstborn in the land of Egypt' – which included the firstborn of God's people who were obviously in Egypt.

In other words judgment is coming, and its coming on the firstborn. And what this tells us is that there is something more behind all these plagues. God is not simply demonstrating His power and authority to the Egyptians. He's indicating that there is a deeper problem. At the beginning of chapter 13 we read: *"The LORD said to Moses, 'Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.'"* And this is reiterated over and over throughout the books of Moses. **'The life of every firstborn is forfeit unless it is redeemed.'** And we don't really understand that, but it was an unmistakable message to these people. All the hopes and dreams of a family was tied up and embodied in the firstborn. It was the firstborn that represented the face of the family. The firstborn son was the family. The whole family was legally, and emotionally, in the son. All of their hopes rode on this son. All of the family's name rode on that child. And what God was saying was that there was a debt hanging over the head of every family on the face of the earth. A debt of sin. **And the firstborn is liable for that debt, he's the representative for the family; he's the substitute;** he is liable for the way you are living, and his life is forfeit unless he is redeemed – bought back.

And to press the point, the Lord tells Moses that the destroyer is coming not just for the Egyptians, but for anyone not under the blood of the lamb. *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, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.* Exodus 12:13 In verse 22 He tells the Israelites that they are to put the blood of that lamb over the lintel and the two doorposts and *'...none of you shall go out of the door until morning'*. That meant that your race would not save you – your religion wouldn't mean a thing. The destroyer doesn't care if you are an Israelite or an Egyptian. It doesn't matter if you call yourself a worshiper of the True God or an idolater. If you're not under the protection of the lamb – you're lost. If you were morally ethically, biblically righteous, doctrinally proper, but you're out from under the blood – you're dead. You'll be as dead as those pagan Egyptians you despise.

But the good news was that God provided for Himself a lamb. In every house in Egypt the text tells us *'...there was not a house where someone was not dead.'* Let me put that another way. **In every house in Egypt that night, there was either a dead son or a dead lamb.** One or the other. In the homes of the Israelites there was a lamb that got what the firstborn deserved. The lamb paid the debt so that the firstborn did not have to pay the debt for the family. Every firstborn Hebrew son must have looked at that lamb and said to himself, 'The only reason I'm not dead is because that lamb is. The only reason I'm not dead is because it is the lamb's blood over the door and not mine'.

But there is something deeper here than the redemption of every firstborn son of Israel. Even though they were delivered from the destroyer that night; even though they were redeemed from Pharaoh's hand – they still lived under a deeper debt. The debt of sin that all mankind is under. As important as that redemption was – they, and we, needed another. As important as that lamb was, it couldn't erase the deeper debt of sin. And so centuries later, Jesus is in the room with His disciples celebrating the Passover meal that chapter 12 describes and they are utterly shocked at how this one goes. They've been doing this every year since they were born – they know how it goes – but it didn't go that way that night. When Jesus blesses and breaks the bread they expected to hear the traditional blessing, **'This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors suffered in the wilderness so we could be free'**.

6 Exodus 11:4-5 ESV

But instead they heard, '*This is My body*'. What He was saying was 'This is the bread of My affliction that I am going to suffer for your ultimate freedom'. And then the gospels record that He takes the cup, the third cup of the meal, the cup of redemption, and they expected to hear "'*Blessed art Thou, LORD our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.*" But instead they hear '*This is My blood*'. Luke explains that Jesus was saying, '*This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood*'. In other words, 'That little lamb in Egypt was only enough to redeem you from from that one night of judgment. *But My blood will redeem you from the final judgment*'. We cannot ever forget that at the very heart of Christianity is a bloody sacrifice that should have been us. There is a tendency today to shy away from the image of dead lambs and bloody doorposts.

But at that Passover with Jesus and His disciples there was one more shock. At the Passover meal you had the bread, you had the four cups of wine, and then you had the lamb. *But here there's no mention of a lamb*. And whether or not there was actually a lamb at that Passover, none of the gospel writers makes mention of it because *the* Lamb was at the table. At least by the time the gospels were written, these guys had got it. Jesus was saying, 'There's no lamb because that lamb is Me. The lamb your fathers killed and ate in Egypt could only accomplish deliverance from Pharaoh and redemption from destroyer. Tonight My death on the cross, My Exodus will provide the ultimate deliverance and redemption for you. That lamb could only redeem the firstborn – My blood will redeem you from the ultimate judgment. With the other lamb, you still had the debt of sin remaining on you – but I'm removing that tonight'.

The point of the story is that we all need a lamb. We all have a sin problem that will damn us eternally unless something is done. And that something was done 2000 years ago on Calvary when the Lamb of God was sacrificed on a cross for our sins. Exodus 12 told those Israelites just what was going to happen one day centuries in the future. You need to notice how perfectly Jesus fulfilled this type. Verse 3 says that each man is to "take a lamb" for his own household. It couldn't be a bull or a dove, which were sometimes used in other Old Testament sacrifices. God was very particular—it was to be a lamb and only a lamb. Nothing else would do. When John saw Jesus coming to him his first words were '*Behold the lamb of God*'. Paul tells the Corinthians that '*...Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*'.⁷

Then Exodus 12:5 tells us '*Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, 6 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*'. The lamb had to be a male, a year old – that is in the prime of its life, as Jesus was, and it had to be unblemished. The lambs were taken on the 10th of the month as we read in verse 3, and then killed on the 14th of the month. In other words, there was an examination period of four days in which the lamb was carefully inspected for disqualifying blemishes like infections or diseases or deformities. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday, the 10th of Nissan, He was subjected to a series of examinations for the next four days on His authority, on His politics, and on His theology by the Jewish secular and religious leaders, and Luke tells us '*...they were not able in the presence of the people to catch Him in what He said, but marveling at His answer they became silent*'.⁸

And when He went before the Roman authorities, three times Pilate declared, '*I have found no guilt in this man*'.⁹ Neither the Jews nor the Romans could find the slightest blemish in this Lamb although they tried their best. They tried every tactic to try and discredit Him and catch Him out, but every attempt failed utterly. They could not find even the smallest flaw in His character, and so even His worst enemies had to concede that He was unblemished, without sin, fit to be a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

And then we are told that the lamb had to be killed at twilight. Literally this phrase means, 'between the evenings', which in Jewish reckoning of time, meant between 3-5 P.M. The New Testament tells us that Jesus was crucified at the "third hour," or 9:00 A.M. Matthew 26:45 tells us that there was darkness from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, or from 12 noon to 3:00 P.M. Shortly thereafter Jesus uttered his final words and died. His body was then taken down from the cross before sundown. So Jesus died "between the evenings" at the exact hour the Passover lambs were being sacrificed throughout Israel on the 14th of Nissan.

7 1 Corinthians 5:7 ESV

8 Luke 20:26 ESV

9 Luke 22:4,14,22 ESV

In every particular, the Jesus the Lamb of God fulfilled all that was set down in Scripture for the Passover Lamb. Down in verse 46 of Exodus 12 we read that you couldn't break any of the Passover lamb's bones, and although it was customary for the Romans to break the legs of those who were crucified, they didn't break Jesus' legs because He had already died. The Passover lamb had to be killed and its blood poured out and then sprinkled on the doorposts of the house. Verse 7 says: *Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.* And in an unusual move for those on execution detail, one of the soldiers overseeing the crucifixion, thrust a spear into Jesus' side, and John tells us that blood and water flowed out, sprinkling the cross with the blood of the Lamb.

Verses 8 – 10 tells us that the family was to eat the meat together with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (a reminder of their days in Egypt). They were not allowed to keep the meat for later use. Any part not eaten must be burned. In other words, the Israelites signified their complete participation in the death of the lamb. His life was taken, his blood shed, the blood applied, the meat roasted, and the meat consumed. In this way, they were reminded that their redemption came through the death of a substitute. The lamb died in their place. By eating its meat, they signified their complete identification with the lamb who died for them. This is what Jesus told His disciples, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you*".¹⁰

Exodus 12 tells us that there is a debt that must be paid; it tells us that a substitute can pay the debt; and the Lamb of God says '*I'm the substitute and I'll pay that debt*'. The whole point of this story of the lamb is meant to point you to the Lamb of God. The story of Israel in bondage to an evil taskmaster is our story. It is meant to describe in word pictures our hopeless condition without Christ. We are not only slaves to sin, without hope in the world, but the debt of sin hangs over our heads, and we are doomed to struggle and work and die at the pleasure of an evil ruler. The only hope of rescue is the bloody sacrifice of a helpless victim. The other thing this tells us is that the destroyer is coming, judgment is coming, and the only hope of getting out alive is the blood of the Lamb. If we shelter under the blood, this judgment cannot touch us. As Paul tells us in the book of Romans: '*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*'.

Behold the Lamb! ***We need to see the Lamb.*** Because we trust in ourselves too much, we fail to have a real appreciation for the debt of sin that hangs over our heads. Honestly, most of us don't think we're really that bad. And even if we have some, small inkling notion that we may have a small problem with a holy God, we reject the idea of a substitute because we're pretty sure we can clean up our act ourselves. I think Thomas Watson said it best, '*Til sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet*'. One of the instructions here in Exodus is to eat this meal with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. This was intended to remind them of the bitterness of their slavery. And it is not until we appreciate the awful bitterness of sin, all the ugly effects of sin together with the awful end of sin, will we appreciate the sweetness of our Substitute and the immensity of our debt that He paid.

To underscore the fact that we need this Lamb, there is this powerful scene that the apostle John saw in the heavens in the last book of the Bible. In that scene in chapter five, John sees God seated on the throne with a sealed scroll in His hand. And the angel is asking the question, '*Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?*'¹¹ The scroll represented the title deed to the earth that was usurped by the serpent, and to break the seals and open the scroll meant that whoever did this had the power to pass judgment on the usurper and redeem creation. And John starts weeping because no one is found who is worthy. But the angel tells him to stop weeping because there is one who is worthy. And John looks up: *And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain,...And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.* And everyone around the throne starts singing: "*Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.*"¹²

10 John 6:53 ESV

11 Revelation 5:2 ESV

12 Revelation 5:9-10 ESV

Don't let this Advent season go by and be lost in the hustle and bustle of holiday stuff. Behold the Lamb. In 1857 Charles Spurgeon dropped by his church one Saturday as it was being remodeled, to test out the acoustics. He stood on the platform and boomed out at the top of lungs with all the feeling he could muster, "**Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Behold the Lamb of God ...**" Way up in the rafters working far away from the platform and unable even to see it, was one of the workmen, a carpenter. As Spurgeon later recounted, this carpenter: '**...heard the words, and they came like a message from heaven to his soul. He was smitten with conviction on account of sin, put down his tools, went home, and there, after a season of spiritual struggling, found peace and life by beholding the Lamb of God**'. Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Let us behold the Lamb.

Our gracious God and Father,

We thank you for showing us this great story of Your deliverance and redemption. Grant us to see the enormity of our debt and the utter mercy of Your provision. Thank You Father, for providing a Lamb. He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; it is His blood that was spilled in our place. It is the blood of the Lamb that is the ground of all our comforts, the foundation of all our joys, the sum of all Your gospel promises and the very essence of our faith. We look with eager anticipation of the day when with all the saints and angels we will sing that new song "Worthy is the Lamb" Wonderful merciful Savior, precious Redeemer and Friend, who would have thought that a Lamb could rescue the souls of men. Grant that we would behold the Lamb we pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God, Amen.

***May the Lord bless you and keep you
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto you;
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace.***