

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
MARCH 18, 2012

“BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD”

Sermon Text: John 1:29

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

Beloved of God,

Who do you say Christ is?

The Christian Church confesses Jesus Christ. It takes its name from Him and proclaims Him as Lord and Master.

But not all church bodies that call themselves “Christian” agree with what Holy Scripture has to say about Jesus. Their opinions vary today just as much they did in Jesus’ time.

Some will say that Jesus Christ was just another wise philosopher, who seemed grossly out of place in a violent society with His message of peace and love for one’s fellow man.

Others will insist that Christ was indeed a great prophet, but only a man like all others before him and not really the Son of God, as his believers claim.

And even more are willing to let Hollywood and the movies decide for them who Jesus Christ was. And still others have adopted a rather apathetic approach to who Jesus was, either in hopes they will not offend anyone who has a liberal opinion of Him, or they simply don’t think it really matters who Jesus was.

But what is of utmost importance to us, as Children of God, is not what the world’s prominent religious leaders teach or what Hollywood and the movies would have us believe concerning Jesus. Rather, it is what the written Word of God has to tell us about Jesus and His purpose here on earth among sinful man that we hold as the Sole Authority. For it is *only* the Word of God upon which we can rely for the truth concerning Jesus Christ and our salvation.

In this connection we will want to look at Peter's testimony and Jesus' own statement in chapter 16 of the Book of Matthew, for it was upon that occasion when Jesus' disciples informed Him of the differing opinions being circulated among the people concerning Him.

After hearing their reports, Jesus asks His disciples, "*But whom say ye that I am?*" (Matthew 16:15)

Peter does not hesitate in his answer (and neither should we).

Forthright he tells Jesus:

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)

Now every Jew could know what that meant. For "*the Christ*" meant "*Messiah*" - that is, the "*Anointed One*" - the One of whom Moses and the prophets from the beginning had testified would bring Salvation and the blessing of God upon all the families of the earth.

Peter says: "*Thou art the Christ....*", the One who by suffering Himself would bring healing to suffering mankind.

And more, Thou art "*...the Son of the living God.*"

Thou, Oh Jesus of Nazareth, thou Oh Christ, art that One of whom Isaiah speaks as the "*Immanuel*", the "*God with us*", and of whom he says that His name shall be called the "*Mighty God*". Yes, thou art the Savior sent by God.

Surely, this testimony of Peter is clear.

And what does Jesus say?

Does He refute Peter's assertion that He, Jesus, is true God, sent of God, to save the world? Does Jesus accuse Peter of Blasphemy or at least command him to be silent?

No, not at all.

In fact, in response to Peter's words, Jesus says, "*Blessed art thou Simon, bar Jona.*"

In other words, Simon, son of Jona, you are not deceived. Your opinion of Me shows you to be a man truly blessed by God. For this opinion, which is nothing less than the Truth, you have not from your own reasoning, "...for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 16:17)

This opinion is Truth that only God can reveal to the human heart, for it is God's own Gospel Truth.

Our sermon text reveals real testimony of the same significance and Truth, given to us by John. John had baptized Jesus the day before. There he had witnessed the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus and had heard the voice of the Father from heaven saying, " *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*"

Thus inspired of God and confirmed by the experience of the day before, John upon seeing Jesus approach, now declares to all: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Let us listen closely again to John's words, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*"

Dear Ones, In this one sentence lies the truth of Sin and Forgiveness, for

- I. It presupposes the whole world guilty of Sin.
- II. It presupposes the dire consequences of Sin, and
- III. It presupposes God's divine plan of sacrifice for mankind.

Our text first of all, presupposes the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden. For it is this first sin committed by Adam that brought Sin into the world and the horrible consequence of Sin, namely death upon all men.

We read Romans 5:12, "*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*" and Romans 5:18, "*Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.*"

This is what is known as *Original Sin*. Its inherited guilty stain and corruption are upon us at our very conception in our mother's womb.

The Psalmist, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit bears witness to this Truth when he cries forth to God, "*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" (Psalm 51:5)

Original Sin has completely corrupted the nature of every human being ever born of natural parents. It has so completely robbed man of the righteousness, that image of God, with which he was first created, that since Adams fall into sin, natural man is at enmity with God. This means he is an *enemy* of God.

This is because the heart of every unregenerate human being is, since the Fall, inclined only towards evil.

Yes, in *everything* he says, in *everything* he does and in *everything* he thinks, natural unregenerate man is wholly corrupt and does naught but evil in the sight of God.

As Isaiah tells us: "*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*" (Isaiah 64:6)

And no natural born human being is exempt from the effects of Sin, as the Scriptures tell us, "*They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*" (Psalm 14:3) and "*For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*" (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

Our text therefore also presupposes the *Consequence of Sin*.

It presupposes the divine wrath of Almighty God, which as the necessary consequence of sin, separates the whole human race from all that is Light and Life. For the wages, (the consequences), of sin is death... *physical and spiritual* death.

And so as the result of sin, natural man is lost in complete moral, intellectual and spiritual darkness in this world. For "*...the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Although man's conscience bears witness to the Law of God written in his heart, this witness is riddled with spiritually fatal imperfections because of sin. So much so, that very often what a man believes to be evil is good and what he believes to be good is actually evil. Hence in his spiritual blindness, man completely lacks the ability to perfectly fulfill the Law's demands.

Therefore, the Law cannot save us.

For as Scripture tells us, “...*by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*” (Romans 3:20)

The Law can only serve to place before us the overwhelming, undeniable evidence of our sins and therewith convict and condemn us to stand before God, guilty of sin and deserving of nothing but the righteous wrath, condemnation and punishment of Almighty God.

Mankind therefore desperately needs a savior from sin and eternal death.

He needs someone to fulfill the Law perfectly in every point for him...to lead a sinless life, to make full satisfaction for his sin, to be his Substitute and his Mediator with God. And this, so that he might be wholly reconciled to God, escape the slavery of sin and the sentence of eternal death and so receive the inheritance of eternal life in heaven.

Our text also presupposes the divine plan of God’s own sacrifice in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, as foreshadowed in all the sacrifices from Abel to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

The Holy Spirit calls us by this divine plan, this *Gospel* message. By His Word He brings light to our darkened eyes and opens our hearts to work faith in the marvelous vision of God decreeing to seek and save lost and condemned creatures such as we.

As God’s own sacrificial Lamb, Jesus willingly took upon Himself the form of a servant, submitted to the demands of the holy Law of God to be man’s substitute ... *OUR* substitute.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”
(Isaiah 53:4-6)

Yes, Jesus Christ, God's own dear Son, lived a sinless life for us, for you and for me. He fulfilled every righteous demand of the Law of God in our stead and suffered the horrible consequences of our violations of that holy Law so we would not.

He, who had never once sinned, took upon Himself the sins of the whole world. The Bible says God "*made him (Jesus) to be sin for us...*" (II Corinthians 5:21) and so Jesus became obedient unto death, even that form of death reserved for the very worst of criminals: the death of the cross.

And this, so that He might once and *for all mankind*, suffer the wrath of God in our place, make complete satisfaction for Original Sin as well as for our many personal sins and thus as the world's one Mediator between man and God, reconcile the whole world unto God.

As we read in Second Corinthians 5:19, "*...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them...*"

Furthermore, our text declares this *All-sufficiency* of Jesus' sacrifice in the words "*taketh away*". Jesus took upon himself the guilt of the *whole* world, paid for *all* sin, completely removing the sins of the whole world.

What a blessing! What a marvelous free Gift we are offered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Every person in the whole world may receive and benefit from the precious Gift of the complete forgiveness of their sins and be clothed in the pure righteousness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But a gift that is rejected does the intended recipient absolutely no good, does it?

In fact, the rejection of this Gift is itself the ultimate sin. It is the sin of unbelief and it is unbelief that damns.

As God's Word tells us: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" (Mark 16:16)

It is only by God's wondrous grace alone, through faith alone worked in the human heart by the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament that we apprehend and receive this Gift of Christ Jesus.

As we read in Ephesians 2:8,9, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*"

Jesus the Christ, then, as His Name implies, *is* the complete and perfect Savior.

*“Not what these hands have done Can save this guilty soul;
Not what this toiling flesh has borne Can make my spirit whole.*

*Not what I feel or do Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears Can bear my awe-full load.*

*Thy work alone, O Christ, Can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, Can give me peace within.*

*Thy love to me, O God, Not mine, O Lord to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest And set my spirit free.*

*Thy grace alone, O God, To me can pardon speak;
Thy power alone, O Son of God, Can this sore bondage break.*

*I bless the Christ of God, I rest on love divine,
And with unfaltering lip and heart I call this Savior mine.”*

(Hymn #389 TLH)

Who do *You* say Christ is?

May we echo John’s God-inspired words in all our thoughts, words and conduct as faithful Christians, witnessing to a world, which so desperately needs to hear, learn and receive of its Savior the true Peace that surpasses all human understanding.

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

Amen.

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And now may the Peace of God, the Love of Christ and the Communion of the Holy Spirit keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our true Pascal Lamb.

Amen.