

Fil-Am Community Church

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11 Jan 2015

Key verse: John 1:29-31

“The Lamb of God”

We’re starting a new series this morning called “Jesus is”. In this series, we’re going to look at some of the titles that the Lord Jesus Christ carries according to the Bible. There are more than a hundred mentioned in the Bible, can you mention some of them? (Ask people)

Great! Out of the several you said, we’re going to look at only a few. Maybe 4 or 6, I don’t know. It could be a hundred. There are 52 weeks in a year. So, that will be good for two years. Amen? Anyway, what I do know is that we’re going to learn more about Jesus as we go through this series. In fact, it is my aim that in all the series that we’ll get into throughout the year, we will all learn who Jesus is. Not just to fill our minds, but to fill our hearts as well. I’d like us to know more of him and not just about him and learn to love him like we’ve never loved him before. This way, we can live lives that are centered around Jesus, truly acknowledging that he is the Lord of our lives, and the Lord of all.

So we’re starting off this series by looking at one of the important titles of Jesus in the New Testament. A title given to him by John the Baptist, his cousin. Why did he call Jesus the Lamb of God? What significance is there in that title? How is it relevant to us today?

Please turn with me to John 1:29-31. Let us read together.

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, “A

man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.”” I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

In the city of Werden, in Germany, there stands a Catholic Church with a lamb carved out of stone and placed on its roof. Centuries ago a worker was once up on the roof of that church in order to repair it. His safety belt snapped and he fell. The area below was filled with large-size rocks. As fate would have it, a lamb was having its lunch on grass growing between the rocks. The craftsman fell on the poor lamb. The lamb was slain... but the man lived. So the craftsman did the decent thing. He sculpted a lamb and, in gratitude, situated it on the roof.

Now, the source of that story is unknown, and, whether it is simply legend or truth, it still bears out one fact: the lamb died, but the man lived.

We're here gathered together in this church because of the Lamb of God. Because of him we're alive. He was the sacrificial lamb who was slain so that we may live. Jesus Christ is that Lamb.

In the passage we just read, John knows his time is coming to an end. And although he will continue on in his ministry for a little while longer, he has essentially fulfilled his mission.

He has been a voice preparing for the Lord's coming. And now that he has come, he is pointing people to Jesus. He is saying, "Look to him, not to me. I will decrease, he will increase".

In the message this morning, I'd like us to see three reasons why we are to look to Jesus.

1. He is Our Sacrifice

John says: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" He refers to Jesus as the Lamb. When he said those words, it connected powerfully with those of that day. For the common Jew understood that the lamb is a reminder

of the Passover—a symbol of salvation through sacrifice. In the old covenant, it was the innocent lamb that took on the guilt of sin. The lamb was killed so that the Jew would know the terrible cost of sin.

So, when John exclaimed, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” the symbolism was not lost to ordinary Jews. Immediately, they also knew that aside from the Passover meal, John was also talking about the lamb that was sacrificed at the temple morning and evening to atone for their sins.

Now, let’s look closely at Passover and we’ll see that even the minutest details of the Passover seem designed to point to Jesus Christ. We will point out ten of the most notable similarities between the events of the first Passover more than three thousand years ago and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross as the ultimate Passover Lamb.

1. It must be a lamb

Exodus 12:3 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. Now, aside from John the Baptist, the apostle Paul says that “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” And Revelation refers to Christ as the Lamb in 30 separate instances.

2. It must be a male

Exodus 12:5 specifies that “the animals you choose must be year-old males.” Jesus fulfilled this in that he was the son born of the virgin Mary.

3. It must be a year-old lamb

This means that the lamb must be in its prime, neither too young nor too old. Jesus died at his prime, at the age of 33.

4. It must be without blemish

The Hebrew text uses a phrase that means “without defect.” This means that the Jewish men would have to carefully inspect their lambs to make sure there were no open sores, no patches of bare skin, no infections, no diseases, no blotches or blemishes, no sickness of any kind.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ is sinless.

5. It must be slain and roasted

Exodus 12 is quite clear on this point. All the lambs were to be slain at the same time and the blood drained from them. Then the carcasses were to be roasted and eaten whole. They were not to be boiled or eaten raw (both pagan customs). Anything left over was to be burned. Thus, the lamb was to be completely consumed.

Both the slaying and roasting picture the sufferings of Christ on the cross. Not only did he die, but his death itself was a complete sacrifice. He died the death of criminal hanging on a hated Roman cross.

6. It must have no broken bones

Exodus 12:46 specifies that when animals were chosen for the yearly Passover sacrifice, none of the bones were to be broken. It was the custom of the Romans to break the legs of those being crucified in order to hasten their death. John 19:32-36 tells us that the Roman soldiers did not break Jesus’ legs because he was already dead.

7. It must be offered “at twilight” (Exodus 12:6).

This unusual phrase is a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase. Although the NIV says that the offerings were to be made at twilight, the words literally mean “between the evenings,” which in Jewish thought meant between 3-5 P.M.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus was crucified at the “third hour,” meaning 9:00 A.M., since the Jews reckoned time in 24-hour periods beginning at 6:00 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. Thus, Jesus died “between the evenings” (3-5 P.M.) at the exact hour the Passover lambs were being sacrificed throughout Israel.

8. It must be sacrificed by all the people

Exodus 12 stresses that lambs must be offered by every man for every family in Israel. And all the lambs must be slaughtered at precisely the same time. Thus, the lambs represented the total participation of the nation in the blood sacrifice. By the same token, Christ was crucified by the Romans on behalf of the Jews. Everyone participated in his death. His death was made as a sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. What many lambs did for many people, Jesus the Lamb of God did for all people.

9. The blood must be sprinkled

Again, Exodus is very specific in describing the ritual. Once the lamb had been slaughtered and the blood drained, the father must take a bunch of hyssop (a leafy bush), dip it in the blood, and then put some of the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe. The blood would be sign that the family had sacrificed a lamb as the Lord had commanded. *“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).

This pictures not the death of Christ, but our application of his death to our hearts by faith. That’s why I Peter 1:2 speaks of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. The lamb alone could not save an Israelite. Not even a dead lamb could save. Not even the blood in the basin could save. Only the blood sprinkled on the doorpost could spare the people from the terrible judgment of God.

Think of it this way. Jesus Christ is our only hope of salvation. He is God’s Lamb offered for the sin of the world. However, Jesus’ blood saves but only when

taken by faith. For those who reject the blood, even the Lamb of God cannot save them.

The Israelites might have done many wise things, and availed themselves of many preventatives against the destruction of the angel; but if they had not sprinkled the blood upon the doorposts they would have perished. Men may strive to do many things to ameliorate their condition as sinners, but the Cross of Christ is their only real protection.

10. The meat must be fully consumed

Not only was the blood shed and the meat roasted, but 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. Thus 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. Through these measures the Jews 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.

The meaning for us is plain. Christ saves us when we “eat his flesh and drink his blood” by faith. Jesus used these very terms in John 6:53-58. He said this speaking not of literal flesh and literal blood but of what saving faith is all about. We are to take Christ completely, wholly, absolutely, and without qualification. When we take him as Savior in this manner, it is like eating and drinking at a feast.

When the ancient Israelites observed the first Passover, when the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the doorpost, that saved them from the wrath of the angel of death that passed over the land of Egypt. In the same, through the blood of Christ, the great Lamb of God, we are safe from God’s wrath and set free from the

penalty of sin. In him and through him and by him God has delivered his people once and for all.

A story is told about a man who was on a luxury liner and suddenly he falls overboard. He can't swim and in desperation he begins calling for help. Now it just so happens that there are several would-be rescuers on deck who witnessed the incident. The first man, when he saw the man fall overboard, immediately reached into his briefcase and pulled out a book on how to swim. He tossed it to him and yelled, "Now brother, you read that and just follow the instructions and you will be all right." The man next to him, when he saw the man fall overboard immediately jumped into the water and began swimming all around the drowning man saying, "Now just watch me swim. Do as I do and you will be all right." When the next person looked upon the drowning man's plight, with deep concern he yelled out, "Now, just hold on friend. Help is on the way. We are going to establish a committee and dialogue your problem. And then, if we have come up with the proper financing, we will resolve your dilemma." The next man on deck happened to be a representative of the school of positive thinking, for he yelled out to the drowning man, "Friend, this situation is not nearly as bad as you think. Think dry!" The next man on board happened to have led too many revival meetings, for by this time the drowning man was going down for the third time and desperately began waving his arm. Seeing that, the revivalist yelled out, "Yes brother, I see that hand, is there another? Is there another?"

Finally, the last man on deck, immediately plunged into the water, at the risk of his own life, and pulled the victim to safety.

This was what Jesus has done. He came to perform the rescue. The world offers different ways to save us but they all for short. Religion, good works, philosophy, relationships, all of these cannot save us. Only Jesus can. Like the

sacrificial lamb during biblical times, Jesus died for our sin. The difference only is that he did it once, permanently.

The second reason why we can look to Jesus as the Lamb of God is because

2. He is Sinless

God required the Jews to sacrifice a lamb that was unblemished. In fact, the book of Leviticus goes into great detail about this and makes it clear that a sacrifice to God cannot have anything physically wrong with it. The reason for insisting on no physical blemish was to symbolize the need for no blemish in the heart of the one who would make the sacrifice to God.

Now, this doesn't mean that those who have physical problems are unacceptable to God – no, it was quite the opposite. God was saying that one who was without sin needed to stand in for all those who did have sin in their lives.

This is quite clear in Hebrews 4:15, *“This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin.”*

I want to take just a moment to explain exactly what sin is. The word “sin” is translated from the Greek word that literally means, “missing the mark.” It was an archery term used to describe an archer who missed the bull's eye. Now, as we know, the bull's eye doesn't change. It is fixed. The bull's eye, spiritually speaking, is God's will or truth. It never changes. Amen?

In our world today, however, people are changing truth, they are redefining sin. They're like Charlie Brown who throws the dart on a blank wall and then draws a circle around that dart as if he hit the bull's eye. That's what people are doing in our time. They are redefining sin in terms that they're comfortable with. They call it a mistake, bad judgment, wrongdoing, and everything else except sin. They even make excuses – the devil made me do it, or I had a bad childhood, I was abused that's why I did it, or I have a mental problem. But it is a spiritual problem. Unless people see it is as a spiritual problem, they will not call sin for what it is.

Now in Christian terms, the bull's eye we are attempting to hit is living in the perfect will of God.

Yet, we know that none of us have ever consistently done that throughout our lives. No one is perfect. If you say you are, then you are lying, and that means you're not perfect.

“For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.” (Romans 3:23 NLT)

So you have sinned, and I have sinned and everyone here who looks so innocent. We've all done it; we've all missed the mark...that is all of us, except this one, Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Now let's take a look at Hebrews 4:15 again:

“This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin.”

Jesus lived approximately 33 years on this planet – he had the same type of temptations that face us all – which means he desired to give into sin. And he was capable of giving into those desires just like we are. If he wasn't capable of sinning, then it makes no sense to say he was tempted. But he did not sin. He never lusted, he never lied, he never stole, he never cheated, he never did anything that missed the mark of God's standard. He resisted the devil for 33 years even though I'm sure it wasn't easy, because it certainly isn't easy for any of us.

And the reason he did this was because he wanted to be able to serve as the sinless Lamb of God on your behalf. Again, this demonstrates to us the tremendous amount of love that he has for each and every one of us here. And it gives us all the more reason to turn our lives over to Him today.

The third reason why we are to look to Jesus is because

3. He is SUPREME (30-31).

“This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Though Jesus came after John, he is preeminent in both time and importance. John the Baptist has continually drummed out this theme. He said, “He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.” John knew that Jesus was eternal. He has always existed. He has the supremacy. He is above all.

So, John’s mission was to prepare people for that which is supremely the best. You see, John’s ministry was thriving. People were coming to him to be baptized. He had lots and lots of followers. But he didn’t let all of this go to his head. He knew that someone greater than him was coming. He humbled himself and acknowledged that Jesus came to save people from their sin.

Sometimes, the reason we fail is that we’re looking to ourselves, not to Jesus. In the 80’s, a book came out called “Looking Out for No. 1”. It’s a nice book. A book about building self-confidence. Yet, it came out during the time when the Me-First philosophy was the prevailing philosophy in our society back then. It was all about me. What’s good for me. What makes me happy. What is fulfilling for me. What will make me confident and successful. But like all other philosophies concocted by misguided people, it deluded millions of people and left them lost and disillusioned. If you think about it, it still is the guiding philosophy of many people today.

The Bible says, *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death”*. (Proverbs 14:12) You see, we cannot trust our own selves when it comes to running our lives. We may be smart and intelligent but we are also weak and vulnerable to temptations. Many popular leaders have fallen because of the lure of fame, fortune and power. Even among Christian leaders. Every now and then, we hear of a famous Christian leader who has succumbed to the call of

worldly desires. Now, it is easy to dismiss them and say “They should know better”. But do we? We are just a temptation away from falling in the same trap. That is why we should look to Jesus. Never take our eyes off Jesus.

We should acknowledge him to be our best guide and decision-maker. We should remember that he alone knows what’s best for us.

So, going back to John’s ministry which was baptizing people, his baptism was concerned largely with leading men to repentance, but this was not the final purpose. John baptized so that Israel should know the Messiah. It was his task to bring to light the fact that the Messiah was coming. So when Jesus came, John said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

There is a story of an English firefighter that scaled a ladder three stories up to save a woman. When he broke the window, she was hiding in the corner and he was barely able to see her because of the thick smoke. He called to her to take his hand that was only a few inches away, but the frightened woman panicked and withdrew further into the smoke only to perish. When interviewed all the fireman could say was, “She wouldn’t let me save her.”

This morning, will you let Jesus save you? Will you look to Jesus?