

Look, the Lamb of God!

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[0:00] That's quite an announcement. Today, a Savior has been born, and He is Christ the Lord. So it's the long-awaited Messiah is finally here.

And that is an announcement that is ringing all around the world, even down to today. Wherever it goes, wherever it is heard, and people believe it, people rejoice because they know that they need a Savior, and a Savior was born.

John, though, we saw this morning, doesn't begin there. He doesn't begin with Christ's birth. He doesn't begin with an angelic announcement.

He has another announcement. And it's one just as shocking. It's one just as amazing as the angels' announcements.

And so if you could turn to John chapter 1. John chapter 1. The Apostle John begins with John the Baptist.

[1:10] And you remember that many people were going out to see John and to be baptized by him.

And it was in that context that John the Baptist gives this amazing introduction and announcement to who Jesus Christ is.

And it's that announcement that I want to focus on this evening as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper. In some ways, this is John the Baptist introducing Israel to their Messiah, introducing us to who Jesus is.

So let's read verses 24 through 29 in order to get some of the context. Now, some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, questioned John the Baptist.

Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet? I baptize with water, John replied. But among you stands one you do not know.

[2:23] He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And it's that announcement that I want to meditate upon this evening. And I just have four brief points about what John is saying here.

And the very first one is, what a statement. I think we're so used to it. You're so familiar with it. I don't think the amazing breadth and weight of the statement can really strike us in the shocking and remarkable way that it ought to.

John the Baptist is saying, look, there is someone who is going to take away the sin of the world. What a statement.

[3:33] We can read that and miss the amazing audacity, the shocking breadth of it. So think about how much time and energy and thought and effort has gone into taking away our sin.

Think about how much energy and time has gone into dealing with our sin. Think about the whole world and how much we've put into getting rid of our sins.

And John's word, John the Baptist's word, splits this dark sky with a lightning bolt. And he says, look, there's the one who's going to do it. He's going to take away the sin of the world.

So men have tried and tried to deal with their sin. You, if you're a Christian, even if you're not a Christian, you've tried and tried in your past to deal with your sins.

Men have fasted and prayed. Men have bled and died. Men have scrimped and saved. Men have done all sorts of things in order to take away their sin.

[4:40] It's not just the religious, though. It's everyone. Everyone in one way or the other is attempting to cover, to play down, to suppress their sin, to go beyond it, to get past it.

To deal with that nagging voice in the depth of their heart, to find some way of being something. Of getting that word that Jesus said on the cross.

It is finished. People have been trying to hear that word from God. That it is finished. It's done. It's taken away. It's dealt with. They do it in all sorts of different ways.

I know I've used this illustration before, but in the Rocky, the first movie, Rocky 1, he doesn't want to win the fight. He just wants to finish it.

And someone says, well, why do you want to finish the fight against Apollo Creed? And his answer is to show that I'm not a bum. And that's really, that's the gospel of the movie of Rocky.

[5:46] You get a chance. You train really hard. You get the big fight. You finish it. And if you can finish it, you won't be a bum. And that's really half of American religion in a nutshell.

I'm going to work really hard. And by my working hard, whether I win or not, but by my effort, I'm going to show what I am and what I'm not.

But whether it's religious or whether it's secular, it doesn't really matter. Sin is still there. Men can't get past it. We can't get over it.

The guilt is real. It's not just a feeling. It is objectively there. And all of our efforts can't get rid of it. And John says, look. So think about that.

That's what the whole world is trying to wrestle with in one way or the other. And John says, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He's going to do what no one else can do.

[6:46] He's going to do what we all wish we could do. There he is. It's a life-changing statement. It's a life-changing announcement.

Maybe some of you, probably not most of you, most of you won't remember when they went on the radio, they went on the television, and they announced that President Kennedy had been shot.

Maybe a few of you do. And if you were alive and you were cognizant, you were old enough, you remember where you were. You remember that announcement.

It was an announcement that wrapped your world up and drew your attention right to it. But I know I'll never forget the day when Katie Couric and Matt Lauer were on today.

And they were talking to an author about a book. And then they went to a breaking news story because there had been a fire at one of the World Trade Centers. And they're showing footage of this fire at the upper level of one of the World Trade Centers.

[7:55] And right there on the camera, a second airplane goes into the other building. I remember it. The country singer Alan Jackson said, where were you when the world stopped spinning?

And that sums it up. It grips you. Everything drug to a stop as you looked at what was happening. And John's announcement has gripped millions of hearts.

Not for a few days or weeks or months or years. But it's this thrill of hope. The weary world rejoices. The Lord is here.

Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So think about that. Again, we're talking about what a statement. Think about it.

You take away sin. You're taking away death. Not directly, but eventually. For the wages of sin is death. Take away sin. And you're going to take away every disease and pain.

[9:05] You're going to take away the curse. So John is not just announcing some sort of small thing. He's announcing this is the turn of the tide. This is where everything begins to go the other direction.

He's announcing the world, the end of the world as we know it. He's saying there he is. He's going to bring God and man together. He's going to end war.

He's going to end poverty and strife and abuse and addiction. The power of Satan is going to come to an end because he's going to take away the sin of the world. That's what John is announcing.

And so you see, it's not some sort of local news announcement. I looked on WNDU and they're like, firemen report to a pole barn fire in Plymouth.

And you're like, hmm, okay, that's exciting. It's not that level of excitement where you look at it and you say, well, what big deal is that? No, it's show-stopping.

[10:08] Look, it's the Lamb of God. It takes away the sin of the world. What a statement. Now, secondly, this statement says something about us. It says something about us.

It implies something about us. What is it implying? What is it saying? Well, it's saying that we can't take away our own sin. It's implying that.

Because if we could, he wouldn't be here to do it for us. It says, look, the Lamb of God, he's going to do it. He's going to do what we can't do.

And we don't do. And so what kind of condition are we in? How bad is this? Well, we can't take away our biggest problem.

We can't take care of our biggest problem. That's where Jesus comes in. We can't take away our sin. And so he doesn't come to bring health and wealth, not directly.

[11:18] That's coming. He doesn't come to bring peace and prosperity, although that is coming. That's not the first thing on his agenda. That's not the first thing on his to-do list. Jesus Christ has come to take away sin.

He's coming to do it because we can't. We sing it. Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul. Not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole.

Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God. Sometimes we want to do something.

Sometimes we say, but Lord, I feel this way.

And the hymnist is saying, none of that. Not what I feel. Not what I do. Not how hard I work. Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear the awful load.

Thy work alone, O Christ, can ease this weight of sin. Thy blood, O Lamb of God, can give me peace within. John is saying something about us.

[12:26] He's saying we aren't the saviors. We're the saved. We aren't the superheroes. We aren't the doctors. We are those who are sick. John is popping a hole in our inflated egos.

I don't know about you, but if you're anything like me, you like to feel competent. You like to go into a situation feeling like, I can handle this.

I can do this. And it makes you really nervous and feels really uptight when you're going into a situation where you don't think you have what it takes. But John the Baptist is saying, in this matter, you can't do it.

It's too much. John's also saying we need a sacrifice. That's how Jesus is going to save us.

You need a sacrifice. You need someone to die for you. That's what a lamb was for. We're going to talk about that in a little bit.

[13:33] But John is saying this is how drastically bad the situation is. You don't need a helping hand. You don't need just a little push out the door.

You don't need someone to hold the bicycle seat, and you can ride it yourself. You don't need good advice. You don't need to know just the right things to do. You knew at least some of the right things to do, and you didn't do it.

You can't do it. You haven't done it. You don't need a guru to teach you the way to God. John is saying we're miles beyond that.

The situation is way far gone beyond that. We have cancer. We have AIDS. We have every disease.

And the Band-Aids aren't what we need. You need what he says. You need a lamb. You need a sacrifice.

[14:39] You need a substitute. That's what John's people, that's what John's hearers, and that's what we know from the Old Testament. That's what we know about lambs.

Lambs were made, were one of the sacrifices. On the night of Passover, that very first Passover, it was a very simple lesson that any five-year-old boy could understand.

It's just this. The lamb dies, or the boy dies. The lamb dies, or the boy dies. The lamb dies, and his blood is spread over the door, or the firstborn dies.

It's him, it's it, or it's me. It's it. It's him, or it's me. And when God sees the blood of the lamb, he will pass over you.

You know, God didn't save a single Israelite boy or man just because he was an Israelite boy or man that night. No one got a free pass.

[15:54] He said he saved because of the blood on the door. He saved because of the sacrifice. It was substitution.

And that's what John is saying. That's where we are. It's not a helping hand. It's a substitution. We need someone to take our place.

We're so far beyond the point of trying to get it right. We're past second chances. Death is coming. The angel of death is coming.

There is going to be a victim, and it's going to be the lamb or it's going to be us. That's what John is saying about salvation. That's what John is saying about this Jesus who's come.

Our situation is to this level. To this point, it'll be him or us. So John is saying something about us. [16:55] We're past doing it for ourselves. We're past self-redemption. Our only hope, our only hope for salvation, for redemption, is a sacrifice. It's a substitutionary sacrifice.

That's our only hope. So it says something about us and how bad it is for us. And third, it says something about Christ. It says something about us, but third, John's announcement says something about Jesus.

What does it say about him? Well, it tells us who he is. It tells us who he is. And it's right there on the surface. He is the Lamb of God.

He is the Lamb of God. He is that sacrifice, that substitute, that one who goes in our place, the place of judgment, that we need.

He's the Lamb. Not a Lamb. He is the Lamb. All the other lambs were pointing to him. All the other Passover lambs were pointing to him.

[18:02] He's that Lamb. So Jesus was born to die. He was born to die. And we can never forget that at Christmas.

He was born a Lamb. He was born a victim. He was born to be led to the slaughter. He was born to give his life as a substitute, a bloody substitute.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. That's found in Hebrews. And right before that, it says, All the blood of bulls and goats can't take away sin. That's the real question here. What can take away sin? All the blood of bulls and goats, lambs, they can't take away sin.

And then it says, Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, A body you prepared for me. Jesus was born for this very reason to be a Lamb.

[19:09] To be sacrificed. So our Lord lying in the manger had an appointment. He had a meeting right from the very first day. It was a meeting with judgment.

He was a man who was born a Lamb. So he was born to save. He was born for us as filthy sinners to put our hands upon him, our guilt upon him, and for him to take our sin to the place of judgment, into the fires of hell, to take our place.

John is saying, Here he is. He's the final sacrifice. And when he dies, he's going to take away the sin. of the world. Now it tells us something about Jesus.

And fourth and last, it tells us something about God. God the Father. Who is Jesus? He's the Lamb of God.

He's the Lamb that belongs to God. He's God's Lamb. In Old Testament religion, who was it that brought the sacrifice?

[20:25] The sinner brought the sacrifice. The man, the Israelite, he went to the temple. He went to the house of the Lord, and he brought his sacrifice.

The sinner presented the sacrifice. The sinner brought the sacrifice for his own sins. But who presents the final sacrifice?

Who makes the final sacrifice? Who makes the final payment, so to speak? Well, it's God. God goes into his flock, so to speak.

God pays for our sin by offering his son as the sacrifice for our sin. I'm not saying God died on the cross. God the Father did.

I'm just saying he presented the sacrifice. The Lamb is his. Abraham had his Isaac. And Isaac was the son that Abraham loved.

[21:38] Well, Jesus is God's Isaac. And so what did Jesus mean to his father? How dear was he to God the Father? Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones said, parents, you know how much your children mean to you.

You know how much you love them. Multiply that by infinity. And now you know how God the Father feels about his son.

You remember when Nathan confronted David about his sin with Bathsheba. And Nathan did it indirectly. He told a story.

He told a story about a man, a poor man. And the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. And he raised it. And it grew up with his children.

It shared his food. It drank out of his cup. And even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

[22:43] Now that was a picture of Uriah's love for Bathsheba. But what I want to say is it's also in a way a picture of God's love and closeness to his lamb.

God had angels. Plenty of them. He has innumerable hosts to be his servants. But the lamb was his one and only.

The lamb was his one and only. Who shared his food. Who drank from his cup. Who slept in his arms. But now a sacrifice must be made for our sins or we're not going to be saved.

It's the only option. That's the only thing left. There's a sacrifice that has to be made. Then there must be a substitute. Behold the love of God that he should send his son into the world.

He gives his son, his lamb. His heart overflows in love. And John says, look, the lamb of God. There he is. So how did he get here?

[23:53] He was sent here. This is love. Not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

This is the depths of God's love. This is how it's manifested. This is how he shows his love for us. We were so far gone.

We were so far past hope. Things were so ugly. We're dead in our sins. We're hating and hating one another. Our very natures are enmity to God.

We oppose God on principle. We hated God on principle. But not that we loved him but he loved us. How deep the father's love. How vast beyond all measure that he should give his only son to make a wretch his treasure. So we go to communion.

[24:57] And as we do, let's think about how it was with us. We were lost. Beyond lost. We were dead. We were past hope, past help.

And out of the fullness of God's love, Jesus came to be our sacrifice. To take away our sin.

That is what he did on the cross. And so as we go to communion, let's think about that. And let's humbly rejoice in our great Savior.

The love of God. The love of God our Father and the love of Jesus Christ who gave himself for us. Thank you.