

Behold the Lamb of God

John 1:29

I want you to know that the lesson this morning, and the lesson this evening really go together. If what you hear this morning “rocks your boat” as they say, all I can say is that you really don’t want to miss the lesson this evening. I’m not saying that just to get you to come back this evening. I’m saying that because I really don’t want anyone to miss the lesson tonight, “We Have An Advocate!” If you miss that, in my opinion, you will miss the most important lesson I have preached this year!

I want to begin the lesson this morning by asking you to read with me a passage found in Hebrews 10. Let’s read together verses 1-10 and then we will get into our lesson for this morning, “Behold The Lamb of God!” I want these words of Hebrews 10 to be like a good cup of tea. They need to be on our minds and hearts and steep a little while, while we tend to some other things. Then at the right time, they will help us put this lesson in the proper perspective. Would you do that? Open your Bible to the book of **Hebrews, chapter 10, and let’s read the first ten verses together:**

Some of you will remember that last year, I spent several months exploring what the New Testament calls “the mystery of God.” When I spoke about that, I was not talking about something that is a mystery today. It may be a mystery for a lot of people today but that is because they are clueless when it comes to the Word of God.

When New Testament writers refer to the “mystery of God,” they are speaking about that which *HAD BEEN* hidden for ages. It *HAD BEEN* hidden, it *HAD BEEN* a mystery, but then it was revealed, brought to light. Those things that the earlier Bible writers and prophets didn’t fully understand was finally made clear by Christ and revealed to the apostles of Christ by the Holy Spirit. They got the last piece of the puzzle as it were. By the end of the apostolic age, the whole picture was there for everyone to see.

The picture preached by the apostles, that we read about in the New Testament referred to God’s plan of salvation that He had conceived before He created the heavens and earth. This was the plan that had been hinted at, little by little by what was revealed to the prophets and writers of the Old Testament scriptures. These Old Testament prophets not only lived through much of that providentially constrained history, they passed on much of God’s purpose behind those events. All they knew was that God was putting together a plan by which all men could be forgiven of their sins and saved eternally. None of them knew all the details, they didn’t understand it fully, but they knew God was up to something.

That’s why Christians must never throw away the Old Testament. That’s why we must never think we do not need to study carefully the writings of the Old Testament. What did Paul tell Timothy about those sacred writings? He said, they are able to *make you wise unto salvation through Jesus Christ* (2 Timothy 3:15).

So God's plan was being skillfully prefigured for us and unveiled in the many things written in the Old Testament. Too often when we read those scriptures, however, what we see is simply a story in some historical context. However, when we understand what God was doing, and when we begin to connect the dots, then we begin to see all of those things were the threads with which God was weaving the great tapestry of redemption. They were clues pointing towards Jesus so that when He came, men would recognize him and understand what He came to do. It was as if God gave His Son a two-thousand year introduction, until it could finally be announced, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*"

One of the most amazing examples of this is something called the "ark of the covenant" and the "mercy seat." These were first introduced to us in the book of Exodus, chapter 25:10-22. It was a chest about four feet wide, two feet high and two feet in depth. It was to be made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold, inside and out. There are some other things we are told about that ark, but in verse 16 we learn that the stone tablets of the law God had given to Moses was to be put in that chest.

God also gave Moses instructions for making a top to that chest that became what is called *the mercy seat*. This lid, as it were, was made of pure gold. Fashioned into that solid piece of gold were two figures in the form of angels, or cherubs. One cherub was fashioned at one end of the top, and the other at the opposite end. They faced each other with wings extended, as it were, overshadowing the mercy seat. In **verse 22**. God says, "*There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.*"

This mercy seat was the place where God would speak to Moses and make known to him all that he wanted the Israelites to know and do. This ark, with its mercy seat covering was to be placed in a very special place called "the holy of holies," which was an inner room within what was called the Tabernacle.

The Tabernacle was essentially a movable tent. It was approximately 45 feet long, 15 feet wide and 15 feet high. Around that tent was an outer court and in that court were two items: an altar of bronze covered wood which was used for the many sacrifices that would be made by the Israelites through the priests. There was also a bronze basin of water in which the priests would wash their hands and feet before they entered the larger room of the tabernacle to perform their rituals and service. Inside the tabernacle was a room called "the Holy Place." In that room there was a lampstand, a table for some showbread, and a bronze altar for burning incense. At the back of that room was another room called the Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies." In that room was just one item, and that was the Ark of the Covenant with the mercy seat on top. Moses was told to warn Aaron, the high priest, and his sons, and all future high priests that they were not to enter that room at any time except at the appointed time of the year—the day of atonement—which was the 10th day of the seventh month.

What happened on that day was very interesting. First of all this was the day when Aaron or later high priests would offer sacrifices for all the people of the nation. There were many other times and types of sin-offerings, but this particular sacrifice was for ALL the sins of ALL the people.

On the Day of Atonement the sacrifice consisted of a bull and two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. The high priest would first of all have to bathe himself before putting on special inner and outer garments. He would then bring the bull to the altar in front of the tabernacle and kill it as a sacrifice for himself and his family. He would then take the two goats and casting lots, set one apart to be used as a sin-offering, and the other as something called Azazel, or scapegoat. He was then to take some of the coals from the altar on which the bull had been offered, along with two handfuls of incense, and he was to enter the holy of holies, burning the incense in a censer so that its aroma would fill the room in which the mercy seat was placed.

He was then to take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat, and he was to do that seven times. He would then go back outside and kill the goat that had been chosen by lot to be the sin-offering. He would take some of its blood and return to the holy of holies. He would then do what he did with the blood of the bull. Moses was told, this was to be done each year to make atonement for the holy place because of all the uncleanness of the people, and their sins. He was then to go back out and sprinkle the sin-offering blood upon the altar to cleanse it, and when he was through with all of that—offering the bull for himself and his household, offering the sin-offering for the tabernacle and the altar of burnt offering—then he was present the scapegoat. He would lay both hands on the head of the live goat, and confess all of the sins of the people of Israel, placing them, as it were, on the head of the goat, which was then sent away into the wilderness, symbolically suggesting that their sins had been removed.

Now, don't you know, as Moses received all of these instructions that he had to wonder what any of this, or all of this was about! Don't you know that he must have thought to himself that the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat must have been the most holy, the most sacred thing in the world? Do you suppose that he had any idea that God's plan of redemption for the sins of the world was being shown to him? Think about it, do you suppose he had any idea?

In 1 Peter 1:12, Peter tells us that angels had longed to look into those things that were now being proclaimed by the apostles and faithful Christians. Think about how that was represented by the cherubim that adorned the top of the mercy seat. As it were, those figures symbolized the angels trying to see into the mystery, trying to understand what God was doing! Did they know, even when they heralded the birth of the Son of God just how God's mercy would triumph over law?

Do you begin to see where this is leading?

- Man's problem is what? Man's problem is sin, isn't it?

- Well, what is sin? John tells us in 1 John 3:4 that sin is a transgression of God's law. Sin is a failure to do what is right, what God requires of us.
- And what are the wages of sin? You know, don't you? Romans 6:23 makes it very plain. The wages of sin is death.

So, if you are sinner, and we all are, then we deserve to die. We deserve the punishment of death. We deserve God's wrath to come upon us and destroy us. We know that, don't we? I'm not saying we fully understand that, but we know we are sinners and we know that if we get what we really deserve, we will be separated from God and punished forever in a place that was really made as a place to punish the devil and the angels that have followed him.

We know that! We don't like it, obviously, but in our heart of hearts, we know it is true. And God knows that it is true as well because His eternal nature is such that He cannot simply say "Kings X." He can't just say, "That's okay. I forgive you." He can't just say that because He is a God in whom there is no darkness. He is a holy God, and He has never ignored sin, any sin! The Bible says, every sin must be punished!

If Adam and Eve were punished for eating fruit God had told them not to eat, don't you think you and I might be in real trouble for all of our sins? Think about all of the lying, and lusting, and leaving undone all of the good things we should have done. Think about all of the ways people ignore God and over and over again resist His overtures of love? Do you really think that you somehow deserve forgiveness and eternal salvation?

So the only hope that any of us had, or have, is that somehow God's mercy really does triumph over God's law, which is what was symbolized by the ark of the covenant covered by the mercy seat. But how could that be? We have already said, God could not just forgive sin without some kind of punishment. God has spoken: "*The wages of sin is death.*" "*In the day that you eat of that tree, you will surely die.*"

So how could God find a way to forgive men their sins without being unjust and untrue to His own eternal nature? Well, we know, don't we? Before He cast the first sunbeam, or fashioned the first star, or tree, God planned for a Day of Atonement! He would do what He would prefigure for us in that ancient rite in that old tabernacle. He Himself would become "*the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*"

That's what John the Baptist was saying there in John 1:29. Jesus came to offer himself to God as both the sin bearer and a sin-offering. Interestingly He was also the high priest! Look at **Hebrews 8:1**. After talking about Christ being the fulfillment of the promise made to David that one of his descendants would be seated upon his throne, and that he would become a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, 8:1 says, "*Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister (or priest) in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.*" Jesus became our high priest!

Now look at **9:11 & 12**: *“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”*

Don't you see, our high priest didn't have to offer a sacrifice for his own sins because He didn't have any sins. So what did he do? He offered his own blood, which brings us back to the blood again! We have been over this before. You know that the Israelites were forbidden to eat anything with the blood in it. Why was that? **Leviticus 17:14** says, *“For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.”*

The blood of a creature or the blood of a person represented the life of a creature or person. Since God is the author of life, and as **John 1:4** tells us, *“In Him—that is, in Christ—was life,”* that tells us that the life-blood of anything or anyone really represented God and belonged exclusively to God. Such was the case of the numerous sacrifices of the Mosaic system. The blood was only and always offered up to God. Symbolically, it said what was sprinkled by the blood belonged exclusively to God.

So Christ came to offer His blood, His life, and while the Israelites, under the first covenant were forbidden to eat or drink blood, what did Christ give His disciples to drink? A cup that represented His blood! Think about that! Let your mind and heart ponder that for a few days!

As the high priest Christ offered His blood, the blood of a sinless lamb. There is an interesting verse in **1 John 2:2**, where John writes: *“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”* That word for propitiation is a form of the word that is translated elsewhere as mercy seat. Paul says the same thing in Romans 3:25, which tells us that the mercy seat of the Old Testament prefigured the offering of Christ. Christ is how God's mercy would triumph over God's law.

Not only, however, was Christ the sin-offering, He also became the scape-goat. That is, upon him was laid the sins of us all. Isn't that what **Isaiah 53** said? It says,

“4) Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5) But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. 6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

I really hope all of this is making sense to you. Last Lord's Day, I spoke on “What I See in John 3:16.” That is regarded by many as the most familiar verse in the Bible. I tried to give you maybe a different, hopefully better way to really understand that great scripture. *“In John 3:16,”* I said, *“I see someone who is perishing.”* Someone—that's us—is headed for everlasting

destruction and torment. Because of sin, mankind has the wrath of God abiding upon them, and when the day of wrath comes, those who have not turned to the Lord for forgiveness are going to suffer unimaginable, indescribable horrors.

But I also said, in John 3:16, *I see Someone who is not okay with that*. Someone is not okay with us perishing, of spending an eternity in torment. That Someone, of course, is God, and His love for us is such that He is not willing for anyone to perish. Someone had to do something, but being the just and holy God that He is, but also loving and merciful, He planned a way for us to have our sins forgiven. And that's where the third thing that I briefly mentioned that I see in John 3:16. We see the one who was willing to come, and go to the cross for you and me. That's the one John saw as well, and called "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

That was what the writer of Hebrews 10 was trying to make clear to us. Listen carefully, or read along with me as we read those words once again...

... **Hebrews 10:1-10**

Are you a Christian? Have you made up your mind you want to be one, and not just one in name, but the real thing? You can be if you understand what the Lamb did for you that day on Calvary. We urge you to think about what has been shown to you tonight, and if you have yet to make that decision to put on Christ in baptism, and have your sins washed away by His blood, then don't wait any longer. We urge you to repent of your sins, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized so you can leave here this evening knowing that what the Lamb of God came to do, at least for your sake was not in vain.

And will you please come back to night to learn more about what Christ is doing for right this minute! Will you come while we stand and sing the song that has been announced?