

JESUS, THE LAMB OF GOD

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SCRIPTURE: Revelation 5:8-13

And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and the four and twenty elders fell down before the lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever.

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!

In this phrase uttered by John the Baptist is contained all the mystery of the redemption and the atonement. Only as we understand the nature and the mission of Jesus, and the necessity for his perfect sacrifice, can we begin to understand the love of God, and his infinite tenderness and care for the human race.

Sacrifice seems to be a universal principle in our world. Without death there is no life. Without self-surrender and sacrifice there is no existence. Unless the molecules of soil surrender their identity and become swallowed up in the nature of the plant, there could never be plant life. Unless the plant dies and surrenders its identity, there could be no animal life. Unless the seed dies, life cannot continue. Unless husband and wife are willing to surrender a part of themselves and a part of their freedom, there can be no family, no marriage, no home. Unless the citizen is willing to surrender and sacrifice something for the good of the state, there can be no state, and therefore no protection for the citizen. Without self-surrender, sacrifice, and death there can be no life, no existence.

Very early in the world's history Cain and Abel offered sacrifices. We cannot understand the nature of sacrifice or the principles governing it, if we start from the wrong premise -- if we get the cart before the horse. Many philosophers who actually know nothing about the subject save what their own imaginations have produced have taught that the almost universal custom of sacrifice grew out of man's primitive fears and attempts to propitiate unknown gods. Latter Day Saints, and many others who believe in the inspiration of the Bible, believe that in the very beginning Adam received a knowledge of the plan of redemption and of the future coming of the Son of God as Savior. If this be true, then Adam and his sons knew something of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," and offered their sacrifice in the similitude of the sacrifice of this perfect Son of God, and all pagan sacrifice is a corruption of this ancient and basic concept of God's great sacrifice who was to come.

When Israel came to the hour of deliverance from Egypt, instructions were given concerning the observance of the first passover. A male lamb, not more than one year old, and perfect, without spot or blemish, was to be killed at evening. Its blood was to be sprinkled on the door-posts of each home in Israel, in order that death might pass that home when all the first-born of the Egyptians were slain. Again the lamb is the type or symbol of the Lamb of God who should deliver his people from death and from the bondage of sin, as the paschal lamb delivered them from death and bondage in

Egypt. That Paul understood this significance is indicated by his words to the Corinthians as he urged them to purge out the old leaven of sin (as the Hebrew household purged out all leaven before the passover) "for ... Christ our passover is sacrificed for us."

The Mosaic laws of sacrifice were a further extension of this symbolism. The sacrifices of the law were made as an atonement for sin; yet as Paul points out in the letter to the Hebrews, none of those sacrifices was a perfect sacrifice. Because none was perfect, the sacrifices had to be renewed from day to day and from year to year, until the last, perfect, and final sacrifice was made -- until Christ, the great high priest, should enter into the heavenly holy of holies after the sacrifice of his own blood, to consummate the perfect, infinite, and final sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Israel's sacrifices were not merely an imitation of her heathen neighbors, but rather, the revoltingly cruel and heathenish sacrifices of her neighbors were a corruption of the ancient idea and philosophy of sacrifice.

Nearly every New Testament writer makes some mention of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice. Many of them refer directly or indirectly to the "suffering servant" of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, who was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who was wounded for our transgressions, who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, who made his soul an offering for sin, who bare the sin of many. John mentions "the Lamb" some 27 times in the Book of Revelation, and his first epistle -- written to combat the Gnostic heresy which denied the incarnation, the deity, the resurrection, and the atonement of Christ -- contains such statements as "His blood cleanseth us from all sin," "He will forgive our sins and cleanse (margin, 'deliver') us from all unrighteousness;" and "He is the expiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world."

Paul's writings are filled with the same philosophy -- that through the sacrifice of Christ and through his blood shed upon the cross man's sins are forgiven -- that Christ is the innocent victim who though without sin was sacrificed for us -- that he who knew no sin was made sin for us and offered as a ransom for many. Peter tells us that Christ "bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." Jesus himself referred to this sacrificial idea by stating that "the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to give his life a ransom for many," and as he passed the wine at the Last Supper, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

How did the sacrifice of Jesus Christ -- the Lamb of God -- atone for our sins? This is a mystery, but it need not be a completely unfathomable mystery. In Adam all the human race fell, because by his sin, the penalty of sin -- death -- became the heritage of the entire human race. Every man and woman since has found himself guilty of a greater or lesser degree of sin. The wages of sin is death; therefore no man could hope for life beyond the grave without the intervention of Deity. Christ too was man, partaking of human flesh, subject to all its temptations and pains and ills. But because he was also Deity, God incarnate in human flesh, he did not yield to temptation; he lived without personal sin. Being sinless, he owed no debt to sin; he was not subject to death. But he willingly and lovingly became the victim of our sin; he laid down his life, that by laying it down and taking it up again he might conquer the power of death, and make it possible for every man who would believe on him and obey his laws and his gospel to be restored to eternal life in the Father's kingdom. By his stripes we are healed. By one offering he perfected forever them that are sanctified. He put away our sin, and the consequences of our sin, by the sacrifice of himself. The just suffered for the unjust -- not that the wrath of God might be overcome by pity, but that the power of Deity might overcome death through Christ the second Adam, on behalf of the whole human race, as the power of death and Satan had overcome the first Adam and through him the race.

How great should be our gratitude then to God, who gave his only begotten Son, and to the Son -- the Lamb without spot or blemish -- who has redeemed us to God by his blood, and who is worthy to receive all power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing, both now and for ever more!