

Message #5

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John

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JOHN THE BAPTIST AND

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LAMB OF GOD

JOHN 1:29-34

I.

Siddhartha Mukherjee (PROJECTOR ON---SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE) is an Indian-born, Harvard-trained cancer doctor. He is currently a professor at Columbia Medical Center in New York City. In 2011 he won a prestigious prize related to his medical work. But it was not a Nobel Prize or some other medical award. It was a Pulitzer Prize for best general non-fiction book. The book was *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*. (THE EMPEROR OF ALL MALADIES)

In the book, the author explains that researchers hoped well into the modern era that they could find that the primary causes of cancer came from outside of the human body. But as Mukherjee notes, they found that **"cancer genes came from within the human genome. We were destined to carry this fatal burden in our genes."** In another place he writes, **"Cancer is a flaw in our growth, but this flaw is deeply entrenched in ourselves."** (PROJECTOR OFF)

The key to recent advances in cancer treatment required an understanding of the true nature of the disease. Such is also the key to treatment of the greatest social problems of our day--- crime, injustice, poverty, broken families, prejudice, war, evil. Law enforcement people are still trying to determine the motive of Stephen Paddock, the killer behind the recent Las Vegas tragedy. Pathologists have examined his brain. Criminologists have examined his political convictions, his gambling involvement and evidence of mental illness. They have not come up with an explanation for his evil deed. Retired FBI Supervisory Special Agent James Gagliano says, **"It's baffling."**

Towson University Professor Richard Vatz gives a better explanation: **"This is what evil looks like: a person self-possessed, uncaring about killing innocent people, aiming for existential "greatness" by committing the (currently) worst act of violence of its type in the United States."** (*Baltimore Sun*, 10/10/2017) This evil likewise involves a disease that comes from within. The Bible calls it sin. It infects all of us, though, fortunately, not necessarily in the same way that it infected Stephen Paddock.

Most of the people in the world around us do not understand the true nature of the problem. A Lifeway survey three years ago found that 67% of American adults agree with the statement "People are basically good." Earlier this year the American Culture and Faith Institute asked a similar question and found that 74% of American adults say that people are basically good.

If that analysis is true, then we humans just need a little tweaking. We need a little better education, a little better economy, a little better parenting, a little better health care system or a little better government. But if it is true that the basic human problem is within all of us, that we are sinners by nature, that there is a little Stephen Paddock in all of us, then we need a Savior. But then there is hope also, because there is a Savior. The passage before us today contains a presentation of that Savior.

We have begun a study of the Gospel According to John. We have seen that the author is the Apostle John, who was writing several decades after the other three Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus were written. So, much of his biographical information is unique to this account. We have also seen that the Apostle John specifically explains his purpose in writing this book in #20. He is organizing his material around seven miracles that are designed to show that Jesus is the Son of God and that people should believe in Him so that they can have eternal life.

The Apostle John is also presenting several witnesses that point to this conclusion. The first is John the Baptist. We learn more about his testimony in the passage before us.

II.

In vv. 29 & 30 we find that WE NEED A SAVIOR WHO IS A HUMAN SACRIFICE. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. WE NEED A SAVIOR...) According to v. 29, "**The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'**"

Last time we saw that John the Baptist was baptizing on the east side of the Jordan River. (JUDEA MAP) Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor who had control over Judea. On the east side of the Jordan River, Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, had control of Perea. In the passage just before this, we saw last Sunday that a delegation from the Sanhedrin showed up to check out John the Baptist. The Sanhedrin was the high council of Judaism composed of 71 priests, laymen and rabbis who exercised considerable authority over the citizens of Judea. They heard reports that large crowds of people were coming to listen to John and to be baptized. They wanted to know who John was and what he was up to. He said that he was simply a voice, a forerunner, who was preparing the way for someone great. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 29 is describing what happened on the next day. Apparently John was doing his preaching and baptizing thing when he spotted Jesus. In front of crowds of people, he declared, "Behold, look, this is the guy! This is the Lamb of God."

This title "Lamb of God" is familiar to most of us who have been in church for a long time. There are songs that have been based upon it, as we have just heard. But this was an unfamiliar term to the people gathered around John. In fact, it is only here and in v. 36 that the title is used in the whole Bible. So students and scholars of the Bible have tried to figure out the exact reference that John had in mind. Remember, this was just the start of the ministry of Jesus. So this was long before the death and resurrection of Jesus. Even the twelve apostles did not anticipate that Jesus was going to die in some kind of sacrificial sense until after it happened. Most of the Jews, including the apostles, were looking for a conquering Messiah who would free the Jews from their Gentile oppressors. How did John the Baptist come up with this title?

One commentator, by the name of Morris, lists nine specific references that have been suggested as the basis for John's exclamation. Most of them relate to ways in which sheep and lambs were used in the sacrificial system established by the Law of Moses. They were used in required daily sacrifices, in sacrifices used in atonement for various kinds of sin and in religious feasts.

I think that it is most important that we keep in mind that John the Baptist was a prophet. Prophets in the Old Testament often did not understand the meaning and significance of their own prophecies. I suspect that this is the case here. Later in the ministry of Jesus, John expresses doubts himself about whether Jesus is the prophesied Messiah.

John's inspired exclamation about the Lamb of God seems to make reference to the general idea of animal sacrifice, for which lambs were used in a number of situations. One of the most notable situations involving the sacrifice of a lamb was the Passover feast. This was the annual event required by God to remind the people of their rescue from slavery in Egypt. In Exodus #12 v. 3 (PROJECTOR ON--- EXODUS 12:3) the Lord told Moses, "**Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.**" He goes on to tell them that this must be a lamb without blemish, which is to be tested to make sure it has no imperfection. Then it is to be killed at twilight, and each family is to feast upon it. This feast with its slain lamb pictures what happens to Christ when he is killed on Passover evening.

Centuries later the prophet Isaiah would describe the coming Messiah in terms involving a lamb. (ISAIAH 53:7) In Chapter 53 vv. 7 & 8 he declared, "**He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.** (ISAIAH 53:8) **By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for**

**his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?"**

At the time that John the Baptist made his description of Jesus, he probably did not understand the significance of his words. He probably did not know about the death and resurrection of Jesus. But the recorder of this story, John the Apostle, was writing from his vantage point years later and understood the significance of this description. This same Apostle John also had a vision of Jesus which he recorded in the Book of Revelation. In #5 v. 6 (REVELATION 5:6) he wrote this about his vision of heaven, "**And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.**"

To the attentive members of John the Baptist's first century audience, the mention of a lamb would have created certain pictures. (PROJECTOR OFF) They may have associated a lamb with innocence. They would have thought about how sacrificial lambs were used as a covering for sin. They would have associated lambs with the idea of substitution. For in the Passover, the idea was that lambs were slain instead of the first born sons who were killed in the last of the ten plagues in Egypt. Every family that killed a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts of their house would avoid the tragic fate that awaited every other family in the land of Egypt.

John further describes this Lamb as being "of God." In #3 Jesus will utter that famous statement in v. 16 that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. This Lamb, Jesus, is sent from God.

This lamb is further described as taking away sin. The verb means "to remove or take away." John's audience may not have understood how the term "lamb" applied to the Messiah. But they could have hoped that the taking away of sin might have reference to a judgment of God upon the sources of injustice present in their day. They might have hoped that John meant that this Jesus would get rid of the Romans and perhaps even some of their corrupt religious leaders. This was not the way that events would play out. The sin would be taken away by Jesus, who was to be lifted upon a cross.

The object of this taking away is sin. Notice that the word is singular. It is not just individual sins that this Lamb will address, but sin as a whole, complex issue. Sin is indeed complex. There are a number of different Hebrew words in the Old Testament and Greek words in the New Testament which are used to describe sin. There are different ways to categorize it theologically. One aspect of sin is legal guilt. (PROJECTOR ON--- SIN) In Romans #8 v. 15 the Apostle Paul writes, "**Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.**" The idea is that the sin of Adam created a situation of guilt for all of us humans who follow after him. We stand under the condemnation of God because of our descent from Adam.

Sin also involves a sin nature that we have all inherited. (SIN 1. LEGAL GUILT 2. SIN NATURE) In Ephesians #2 v. 3 Paul speaks of our situation apart from Christ "**among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.**" In Romans #7 Paul indicates that this sin nature is still present in followers of Christ.

The Bible also speaks of individual sins. (SIN 1. 2. 3. INDIVIDUAL SINS) This is often the aspect of sin that we first think about when we hear the term "sin" used. James speaks about this aspect of sin in #4 v. 17 of his book when he writes, "**So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.**" Thus sin can involve failure to act as well as acting wrongly. Individual sins can involve deeds of omission and commission. They may involve wrong actions in thought, word and deed. Sin is indeed complex. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The promise of v. 29 in our text is that the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. In what sense does He do this? The picture of a lamb with its Old Testament sacrificial background promotes the idea that the death of Jesus has something to do with this removal. We can see that sin is still around in our world. So it is not completely gone. Perhaps someday it will totally be removed. But it is still around, and even we Christian can recognize that it is still in our lives.

The notion that the New Testament promotes is that the death of Christ has removed the penalty for our sin. The Lamb of God has provided an atonement, a covering for our sin. He is our substitute for the penalty for sin that should fall upon us. The Book of Romans also promotes the idea that the Lamb of God in His death has removed the power that sin has upon His followers. We Christians are no longer slaves to sin.

Notice also that the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. John the Baptist was speaking originally to a Jewish audience, which tended to think that salvation was limited to Jews. But here the promise is that the taking away of sin extends to Gentiles as well as Jews.

Then in the first part of v. 30 notice that John says, "**This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me...'**" In v. 29 John uses the terminology of an animal to describe Jesus and His role as a sacrifice. The primary purpose of His first coming was to provide an atoning sacrifice for sin. But this mention of a lamb is clearly a figure of speech. For here he makes it very clear that Jesus is a human being, and the specific Greek word that is used means "a male human being."

As such, Jesus qualifies to be our representative. The point of the incarnation--- the story of Christmas--- is that God took on a human nature. He was born into the human race. Forever afterward He will be a human being. Because of that identification, He was able to stand in our place, to be our representative, in satisfying the righteous demands of a holy God. He was able to bear the wrath of a holy God in our place to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. For we need a Savior who is a human sacrifice.

III.

In vv. 30-34 we are reminded that WE NEED A SAVIOR WHO IS ALSO GOD. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. WE NEED A SAVIOR...) In v. 30 John the Baptist is quoted as saying, **"This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'"** This is the same thing that John said in v. 15. This Jesus is of much higher rank than John because He existed from eternity past. He was around at the time of, and even before, the creation of the universe.

John continues in vv. 31-33, **"I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.' And John bore witness: 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'"**

Jesus grew up in Galilee in the north. John the Baptist was raised in the south. At some point he also lived in the wilderness in the eastern part of Judea. So it is possible that they had never met. But given the close connection that the mothers of these two individuals had--- Mary and Elizabeth--- it seems likely to me that John and Jesus knew each other directly. Mary had gone to visit her relative Elizabeth when they were both pregnant. They both had religious families. Religious families went up to Jerusalem several times each year to observe the feasts. I suspect that at least at these feasts Jesus and John had opportunity to encounter each other.

If that was the case, then John may be saying in v. 31 that he did not know that Jesus was the Messiah. He did not initially know that his relative was the Lamb of God. He may have realized that there was something special about Jesus, even as he was aware of the unique circumstances of his own birth. But in his role as a prophet, John had somehow been told by the Lord that he would be given a sign. John was to watch for someone on whom a visible manifestation of the Spirit of God would be given. In v. 32 John says that sign was given to him in regard to Jesus.

The Apostle John in this Gospel does not record the details of that experience. But we learned last week from the reading from Luke #3 something about the details of John's public ministry. Mark's Gospel presents a condensed version of events that helps us put John's ministry and his interaction with Jesus in a chronological framework.

So we are going to turn to the first chapter of Mark's gospel. (MARK 1:4) We will begin with v. 4: **"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."** This is the summary of his ministry and the content of his message. (MARK 1:5) Verse 5: **"And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."** This is the summary of the response to his ministry.

(MARK 1:6) Verse 6: **"Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey."** This is the summary of his simple lifestyle. (MARK 1:7) Verse 7: **"And he preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.'"** (MARK 1:8) Verse 8: **"I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."** So this is the summary of what John said about Jesus, most of which John's gospel has recorded.

(MARK 1:9) Now in v. 9 we come to the baptism of Jesus: **"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."** In Matthew's account John expresses hesitation about baptizing Jesus. He has some understanding that Jesus is a special person. Certainly Jesus has no need to repent. Perhaps His baptism by John expresses His identification with the people of Israel.

(MARK 1:10) According to v. 10, **"And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove."** This seems to be describing what Jesus saw. Our text in John's Gospel says that John the Baptist saw it also. Perhaps everyone else who was present saw it, too. We are not told.

What they saw is not exactly clear. It does not say that they saw a dove. They saw something like a dove. There was some kind of visible manifestation of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus. If there is any special significance that should be attached to a dove, that is also not clear. Doves were to be used in certain sacrifices offered by poor Jews. Also it was a dove which returned to Noah indicating that the flood waters had receded, and the earth was ready to be repopulated.

As for the Holy Spirit's connection with Jesus, we need to keep in mind that Jesus was already the Second Person of the Trinity. He was the Son of God. But this special manifestation of the Holy Spirit comes upon the God-man Jesus. In vv. 32 and 33 in our text in John, it is twice stressed that the Holy Spirit remained upon Jesus.

There were hints in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit would have a special connection to the Messiah. In Isaiah #11 v. 2 (ISAIAH 11:2), for example, the prophet writes, **"And the Spirit of the Lord**

**shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."** Also in Isaiah (ISAIAH 42:1) in #42 v. 1, there is this: **"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations."**

Back in Mark #1, there is something more that catches the attention of those who are present for the baptism of Jesus. (MARK 1:11) According to v. 11, **"And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'" Imagine how hearing this voice from heaven may have affected those who were present.**

Then in vv. 12 & 13 (MARK 1:12) we read, **"The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. (MARK 1:13) And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him."** So the general understanding is that after this baptism and forty days in the wilderness and temptation by Satan, Jesus showed up to see John again, as recorded in our passage for today. Jesus tells the crowd that is gathered this day, the day after the Sanhedrin delegation questioned him, that this Jesus is the object of his preaching. This is the Lamb of God. This testimony is the highlight of the witness of John. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 34 in our passage in John concludes the testimony of John the Baptist: **"And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."** This is not one of many sons of God. This is the Son of God. This is the Second Person of the Trinity. This ties in with the Apostle John's stated purpose of the book recorded in #20 v. 31. He wants his readers to believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

So it is that Jesus is both a human sacrifice and God in the flesh. In order to provide a satisfactory atonement, in order to be our substitute to pay the penalty for our sin before a righteous God, it was necessary that He be a human being. In order for His sacrifice to have universal benefit, He needed to be God. By His death on the cross, He paid the penalty for the sin of the world.

In order for that sacrifice to have benefit to us as individuals, there is one responsibility that we have. We need to believe in Jesus. We need to recognize that we are sinners who are separated from a holy God by our sin. We need to believe that Jesus was both God and man and that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. He rose from the dead to prove that He was indeed God. The Apostle John describes that responsibility in v. 12 of our chapter: **"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..."**

In the opinion of many artists (MICHELANGELO DAVID), Michelangelo's portrayal of David is the greatest sculpture that has ever been created. It portrays David with his sling in hand about to take on Goliath. In



1504 the completed six ton sculpture was placed by the entrance of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, Italy. It is 17 feet tall.

A sixteenth century artist and historian by the name of Giorgio Vasari said about it: **"It cannot be denied that this work has carried off the palm from all other statues, modern or ancient, Greek or Latin; no other artwork is equal to it in any respect, with such just proportion, beauty and excellence did Michelangelo finish it."** Art experts recognize that it captures the image and essence of man.

But there is a problem with Michelangelo's David. (MICHELANGELO DAVID ANKLES) The center of gravity in the base does not line up exactly with the center of gravity in the figure itself. So tiny cracks have developed in the ankles of the marble statue. These cracks have the potential to destroy the statue. If Florence should be struck with a major earthquake, David could come tumbling down. **"So here we have the crown jewel of creativity, art, beauty, and sculpture, and yet he's flawed, fragile, in need of restoration, poised on the verge of catastrophe."** (Stonestreet, Breakpoint, 9/19/2016) (PROJECTOR OFF)

Such is the situation that confronts us. We are created in the image of God. Yet we are flawed by sin. We are in need of a Savior. In this Thanksgiving week we can be thankful that the Lord has provided us with the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.