

+ Isaiah 53:4-7 + The Lamb of God + Good Friday + 29 March 2013 +

On this Good Friday evening as we consider the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, you can't help, but see some very vivid images in your mind's eye. The Gospel accounts are just too descriptive. You see the sorrow and the pain. You see bruises and blood. You see a murderous crowd, leering enemies, and a cowardly Roman governor. You see a crown of thorns, a ragged purple robe and mocking soldiers. Perhaps you even see Satan laughing with glee. You see a heavy cross and exhaustion. You see nails and a hammer. You see ridicule and mourning. You see deserving thieves on either side. You see darkness and suffering and the pangs of hell, and then you see the end. All these dark, sad images come to mind as we hear the account of the final hours of Jesus. For good reason, it's not unusual for such images to bring a tear to the eye, because deep down we know why it's all happening.

Yet as those images come to mind this Good Friday evening, there's one image we ought not forget, an image of peace that stands out amidst all the violence, an image of hope that stands out amidst all the hell-bent despair, an image of life given and shed amidst all the death. Amidst all of that darkness, there is no more glorious and beautiful image than that of **THE LAMB OF GOD**, who comes to take away the sin of the world.

Why a Lamb? Isn't a lamb supposed to be cute and cuddly and harmless? I mean, little ones typically have stuffed animal lambs for snuggling. Why an innocent lamb amidst all that violence and suffering and death? Ask the ancient Israelites yearning for freedom in Egypt and they'll tell you why. They'd tell you it was the blood of a year-old, male lamb without defect that served notice to the angel of death to pass over their homes as he wiped out the firstborn of Egypt. It was the meat of a lamb that they would eat at this time every year in remembrance of God's gracious deliverance.

Ask the ancient Israelites who traveled to the temple in Jerusalem and they'll tell you why. Lambs and sheep and goats and cattle were sacrificed daily in the fires of the altar as burnt offerings for sin to the holy God. Blood shed symbolized sins forgiven, and no day of sacrifice was greater than the annual Day of Atonement, when two young male goats were chosen for a special purpose. One was sacrificed with its blood sprinkled on everything because blood shed symbolizes sins forgiven. With bloody hands on the head of the other, the high priest would confess the sins of the people and then the goat with all those sins would be abandoned in the wilderness to remind the people how God would take away the guilt of their sins forever.

In the words of the prophet before us, God's Old Testament people would've seen the Lamb of God, who was coming to take away the sins of the world. John the Baptizer, the last of the prophets, even described Jesus that way. So it should be no surprise that we see the Lamb tonight.

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.” Across the centuries, the prophet stands with us on that accursed hill outside of Jerusalem and draws our attention away from the thorns and the nails and the mockery and the despair to the One hanging on the cross. There the Lamb of God takes up all that plagues you and me on to himself—***“our infirmities”***, our weaknesses, our illnesses, our faults, the effects of sin in our lives and in the lives of all whom we know and love, the consequences of every sin you and everyone else has ever committed.

The Lamb of God takes up those ***“infirmities”*** and carries ***“our sorrows”***—all that well-earned sorrow over what you've done or failed to do, all that sorrow over the consequences of your sins and the sad impacts that they've had on the people around you, all that sorrow over the effects of sin in your life and in our world, all that sorrow over tragedy and injustice and violence and suffering, all that sorrow over the death we've all earned with our sins, the death that takes loved ones away and will one day come for you. All of that the Lamb takes on his almighty shoulders and carries away, even as he is ***“stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.”***

What? Where's the justice in that? Why should the innocent Lamb of God endure all that? Why should he suffer all that? Why should he go through hell with his heavenly Father turning his back and forsaking him when you and I standing here are the ones who deserve it all?

The prophet turns our eyes once more to the Lamb of God hanging on the cross to see the reason why. ***“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities...”*** It was our sins, your sins, my sins that caused him to endure all that, to endure the death and hell we all deserve. He was pierced to death because we crossed God’s forbidden line. He was crushed into the dust because none of us could measure up to God’s standard of holiness, but the Lamb of God wasn’t pierced and crushed for our sins just so we would feel our guilt in all its wretchedness. No, ***“the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”***

Do you understand why we need to see the Lamb of God in that place of violence and suffering and death on Good Friday? It’s not about making us hurt, but about making us healed. We crossed God’s forbidden line, but Jesus took the punishment that we might have peace with God. The guilt of your sins and mine leaves us wounded and bleeding and near death, but it’s the wounds that he endured, ***“the stripes”*** as the old King James used to say, his blood that was shed that cleanses our wounds and brings us healing we won’t find anywhere else. Those wounds of Christ restore us to new life, for in those wounds we see the wondrous love of God for us in all its beauty.

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Whether you want to admit it or not, every one of us knows deep down how far we have strayed from our holy, loving God. You and I know how much the burden of those sins, public and secret, known and unknown, crush us to the ground, but ***“the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*** The Lord of free and faithful grace who saves the undeserving with no concern for himself takes all that guilt that you’ve been carrying, even for that one sin you won’t let go, and dumps it on Jesus with unrelenting force. The Father turns his back on his Son to turn his gracious face towards you. He picks you up, dusts you off, and clothes you, then, with a robe of the righteousness of his own Son.

“...But Jesus doesn’t deserve to endure this. I deserve this!”, you want to cry out. “Yes, that’s true,” the prophet tells you as you gaze at the Lamb of God hanging on the cross, “But that’s not what God wanted. He loves you more than you can imagine, and if you’re not sure, look at the Lamb once more. ***He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.***”

See, the Lamb of God goes to this place of violence and suffering and forsaking and death willingly. He doesn’t complain. He doesn’t object. He doesn’t refuse. He goes and he keeps going to the slaughter, because he knows it’s the only way to save you, to forgive you, to reconcile you with God and open heaven for you. He knows his blood is going to be shed. He knows the whole world will reject him as he is lifted up on that cross. He knows his heavenly Father will forsake him. He knows he will come down from that cross as a lifeless corpse, but yet he goes. He goes because he loves you with a love that’s willing to sacrifice God himself.

The Lamb of God has come to take away the sins of the world, even your sins and mine every single one of them. Watch the Lamb as his holy, innocent, precious blood is shed, but see in the Lamb the most glorious and most beautiful picture in all of Holy Scripture. Watch the Lamb as he hangs on the cross and hear forgiveness and eternal life flow from his lips. Watch the Lamb as he hangs on the cross and stays there through the torment and the agony of hell to fulfill what he left heaven to accomplish. Watch the Lamb declare your sins forgiven, your life restored, and your heaven opened forever through his blood. See that Lamb of God and spend the rest of your days in this life and your eternity in heaven praising the Lamb who was slain for the gracious, willing, uncomplaining love he shows you today, for ***“worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”*** (Revelation 5:12) My friends, watch the Lamb! Amen.