

THE DISTINCTIVE MESSAGE OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

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"Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:29)

Blater Heroni, from Adis Ababa, was sent from Abyssinia, as his country's representative to the Treaty of Versailles. Held in high esteem in the courts of his own land, he was also a humble Christian brother, and received his education at a Swedish Mission School in his homeland. Meditating upon the subject of world peace, it dawned upon him that such was only really possible through the sacrifice of Christ's Cross. His Abyssinian mind conceived this thought in symbolic form, and he passed his ideas on to an artist in the city of Paris, France, requesting him to put the same on canvas in picture form. The result was a painting of the crucifixion that has been described as "weird in its conception, real in its symbolic significance, strangely attractive and compelling in its message".

The Lord Jesus is shown hanging on a cross that rests between two worlds, the western and eastern hemispheres. Behind is a cloudy and lurid sky. There's a halo of coming glory resting over the thorn crowned head of the Saviour. He is shown also as looking down upon the world for which He died. From His nail pierced hands and side His blood drops down and colors every continent and island red. It is intended to be symbolic of the whole wide world brought into the redemptive scheme of God's providing. Underneath the picture, in three languages, can be read the immortal words of John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life".

When George Bennard was captivated by the immortal John 3:16, he put his thoughts into poetic form, and wrote the hymn "The Old Rugged Cross". But this Abyssinian brother, who could neither write poetry nor even paint the picture himself, asked another man to express in picture the burden of the message of the Cross that had captivated his mind.

Peace is only possible through the blood of the Cross, and the only hope for this old world of ours lies in the Crucified Christ, who men neglect in their ignorance, apathy, rank indifference and sin, and whose sovereign claims they repudiate. They put their faith in things such as the Treaty of Versailles, and pin their hopes in such gatherings as the League of Nations, and now the United Nations Assembly, only to have their faith betrayed (remember Munich, 1938?) and their hopes dashed to the ground.

When on Jordan's banks the Lord Jesus approached John the Baptist, God testified of His Son in these words: "This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased". It followed right after His baptism, when even in that act He had identified Himself with sinful humanity, and numbered Himself among the transgressors. But the Baptist announced Jesus to the people gathered there as "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world". He repeated that statement the day following. The idea of the lamb, the sacrificial lamb, lay at the very center of the Jewish ritual, ceremony and economy. The expression itself is also couched in the language of the Old Testament, in which background alone the title can be truly understood.

John, the apostle, was then a young man in Galilee. He was just about to make that great surrender of himself to the Master's call to discipleship. That thought of his beloved Master being "the Lamb of God" took hold of him, and it was he who recorded the narrative itself in

his gospel. Under the figure of "a Lamb" the Baptist had described the redemptive work of the One whom he was come to love very dearly. The idea almost haunted him, and never left him till his dying day, and as the aged seer of Patmos, it was as the Lamb of God that he again, in vision, gazed upon the Lord he loved. Twenty-nine times at least, in the book of Revelation, John speaks of Him as the Lamb.

John stood around the Saviour's cross when He died. He saw it all worked out before him then. But with the advent of Easter day, even for John it took upon itself a new and fuller meaning, for the One he loved was the Lamb once slain but now arisen. And that fact made all the difference. The meaning and mystery of it grew again when from the brow of Mount Olivet he saw the Saviour ascend. Then came the day of Pentecost, with the consequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then he really understood. With the other disciples, it was Jesus and the resurrection that he proclaimed so fearlessly.

In vision apocalyptic John was also to behold "a Lamb as it had been slain," but he knew right well that the Lamb once slain was now arisen and enthroned above in regal splendor at God's right hand. With the author of the epistle to the Hebrews he was to declare in his preaching ministry that this once-crucified but now arisen and ascended Lord Jesus, seated at the Father's right hand, was interceding for those below, and able to save from, and to the uttermost, all who approached Him in penitent faith. In his written "Gospel" he was also to record that night interview that his Master had with Nicodemus, and the Saviour's own words: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man—the Lamb of God—be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:14-17).

It was the Spirit's anointing at Pentecost that really interpreted to his mind the meaning of it all. "We have seen", he said in his first epistle (1:3 and 4:14), "and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world". And Abraham, the patriarch, expressed the same conviction centuries earlier, in that Genesis 22 narrative, that "God will provide Himself a Lamb".

The key to the title "Lamb of God" lies, we said, within the pages of the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus was the fulfilment of the old covenant types. He was the pass-over lamb of Exodus 12, and the scapegoat of Leviticus 16. The Lord Himself surely referred to this "passover lamb" incident when He revealed Himself to those two disciples on the Emmaus road. He opened up to them the Scriptures, and from them spoke of all the things appertaining to His redemptive vocation as the Lamb of Divine appointment (Luke 24).

I have referred you to the incident of Abraham and Isaac on Moriah. You know, that story has always thrilled me. My mind takes me back to a breaking of bread service I once took part in. I was then a very young and immature young man, and had only known the Lord as my Saviour a few years. The meeting itself was an open one, and we brothers were free to take part in it as the Lord led. The meeting itself had been centered around the Lord's sacrifice as God's Lamb, and I believe He directed me to read the appropriate verses in Genesis 22. "They came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar ... and Abraham

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