

Last week we started a series in which we're going to work through the Gospel of John. Last week we saw that John is different to the other three Gospels and it starts with an amazing prologue that points to Jesus as the Word who is God and who became flesh, so that, anyone who believes in him has the right to be a child of God.

In the passage we read today we have an odd name given to Jesus. John is the only bible author to use the title - the Lamb of God. It's not a title we would use so much today, however, it is an idea the Jews in John's day would be familiar with. Paul and Peter mention Jesus as a lamb but John is unique in giving Jesus the title, Lamb of God. It is important therefore to try and work out why John does this.

The 1st time we see this image of the lamb is in Genesis chapter 22. Abraham has been asked to go and sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. As they are travelling, Isaac asks his father where the lamb for the sacrifice is, to which his father replies, Genesis 22:8 '*God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.*' *And the two of them went on together.*

Eventually, just as Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac, God stops him and provides a lamb for the sacrifice. It strikes us as a terrible thing that God has asked Abraham to do. As a test of faith it is probably much further than any of us would be prepared to go, however, in Hebrews chapter 11 with that Abraham reasoned that God would not lie and, having promised that Isaac would be the 1st of many offspring, he reckoned that God could raise Isaac from the dead to fulfil that promise.

I said before (It's all about Jesus pic) that it's really important to have a basic grasp of the Old Testament so that we can more fully understand the New Testament. So let's start with Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb?" You see, if there is no lamb Isaac has to die. We get caught up in the drama of the story, and with hindsight understand what was to happen. If God did not supply the lamb there was no hope for Isaac. This story in Genesis is about much more than just Abraham having his faith tested. Notice what is going on in the story:

- Abraham was asked to sacrifice his only son.
- He was to take his son to Mount Moriah to offer that sacrifice.
- It was God who ultimately supplied the sacrifice that day.
- God provided the sacrifice so that Isaac would not have to die.

Do you see the similarity in that story and in the story of Jesus. In Genesis God painted a picture of what he was going to do when he sent his only son to die on a cross so that each of us can be saved from spiritual death and receive new life. The place of sacrifice is not a coincidence - *2 Chronicles 3:1: Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where [the LORD] appeared unto David his father; for which provision had been made in the Place of David, in the threshing floor of Ornan [Araunah] the Jebusite.*

The place of provision became a place of worship and, in Jesus, what we see is that that God has provided another lamb but this time it is him who is worshiped.

Isn't it interesting that in John's gospel we have the answer to Isaac's question. John 1:29 *The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'*

If Jesus hadn't died on the cross none of these old Testament characters would have been any better off. Hebrews chapter 11 talks about faith and some of the amazing people we read of in the old Testament. However, right at the end of that chapter we read this: Hebrews 11:39-40 ³⁹ *These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,* ⁴⁰ *since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.* If Jesus hadn't died these saints would have no hope of their sins being forgiven but, because Jesus died, their hope and ours is fulfilled.

There is, of course, one more time in the year when a lamb was offered as a special sacrifice. On their last night in Egypt, the Israelites were told to sacrifice a lamb. It was to be a lamb without blemish or defect and its blood was to be painted on the door post and lintels of the homes so that death would pass over those homes. It was, and is, known as Passover. The tie-in with Jesus is obvious: he was the lamb of God who came to take away our sins. He was perfect and sinless. His blood covers the sin in our lives so that we no longer have to fear death. Again, the story of the sacrifice of a lamb was God's way of telling the gospel story through the history of Israel.

Since the time of the Exodus lambs would have been a primary animal of sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel. Throughout the old Testament the blood of lambs served as an atonement for the sin of the people. This sacrifice did not have the power to take away sin forever but, for a time, made it possible for God to be able to dwell among them in the tent of meeting. They could not erase the sin completely because they were not perfect atoning sacrifice. The lambs had done nothing wrong, they were helpless innocent sheep that were killed in place of men who were guilty of sin and deserves death. It is possible that this is what John has in view when he calls Jesus the lamb of God. Though he is innocent of sin he was put to death for the sins of the world so that we could be forgiven.

There are other pictures in the old Testament that could speak of Jesus: John could have been thinking of the lamb referred to as the sin offering in Leviticus chapter 4, or the trespass offering of Leviticus chapter 5 or the sacrifice on the day of atonement Leviticus chapter 12. Jesus captures all the old Testament images of the lamb: Isaiah 53:6-8 *We all, like sheep, have gone astray,*

*each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

⁷ *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.*

⁸ *By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.*

Isaiah 53:11-12 *After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.*

*¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.*

The lambs that were slaughtered for the sins of the people were imperfect and could not take away our sins. It takes the sacrifice of the perfect lamb to remove our sins. Jesus is that perfect lamb. He is the ultimate sacrifice. To think of it logically: if a man was to die for his sins, one man dies one death. A finite being comes to its end. So the sacrifice of a finite being goes only as far as its life could take it. But the sacrifice of something, or someone, that is infinite would be a sacrifice that could cover all sins for all time. That is why Jesus came. As an infinite being His sacrifice could cover the sins of all people, and through Him all people might be saved. So Jesus died for the sins that he never committed, so that we could be saved from the sins that we have committed. By His blood...the blood of the lamb, we can be saved.

Revelation 5:5-14 ⁵ *Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'*

⁶ *Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits^[a] of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying:*

*'You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign^[b] on the earth.'*

¹¹ *Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying:*

*'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honour and glory and praise!'*

¹³ *Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:*

*'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honour and glory and power,
for ever and ever!'*

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, 'Amen', and the elders fell down and worshipped.

John 1:31 *I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.*