

“Behold the Lamb”  
John 1:29-42a

January 15, 2017

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

Imagine a young man deliberately and intentionally pulling a five-hundred-pound slab of rock on his shoulders. It would obviously be a very heavy burden. It would be a burden that would crush him. It would be a burden which he would not have the strength to remove. However, as he pretended that the heavy burden was not bothering him and as he struggled mightily to remove the heavy burden from himself, he says, “I’m okay. I can handle this.” And then he dies – crushed under the heavy load.

Now, this is such a stupendously stupid story that I don’t have to tell you that it’s not based on a real event. No one would ever intentionally take such a heavy burden upon himself. No one would deny the danger of such a heavy burden. No one would believe that he could free himself from such a burden. Yet, this story illustrates how we often deal with a very heavy burden in our lives.

We are all familiar with burdens. The burdens may be physical in nature. Our financial situation may be a burden to us or our family. Our health and the sicknesses we endure may be a heavy burden. Our aging and eventual death are very heavy burdens. The burdens may also be emotional in nature: sadness, grief, depression, mental illness, and so on. All of these can be heavy burdens which are very debilitating and weigh heavily upon us.

However, as burdensome as all of these things are (and they are indeed burdensome), none of them is *the* burden of which the Word of God speaks. These are all symptoms of the burden and results of the burden, but none of them is actually the burden itself. That which is our great burden – the five hundred slab of stone which is crushing us – is sin.

Like the young man in my illustration, we have deliberately and intentionally brought this burden upon ourselves by committing sin. Whenever we have thought, spoken, or done any evil forbidden by God according to the Word of God (not according to the world), we have brought a great burden upon ourselves. Whenever we have failed to think, speak, or do all of the good which God requires of us in His Word, we have brought a great burden upon ourselves.

As bad as the physical and emotional burdens we bear in this life are, they are only symptoms of our sinfulness or the results of specific sinful actions we have done. The burden of sin itself is far worse. Sin wears us down with guilt and condemnation from God. Sin burdens us with physical death for our bodies here on earth and with spiritual death for souls in hell.

We try to pretend that the burden doesn’t bother us. We deny our guilt or try to redefine sin so that we don’t experience guilt. We struggle mightily to get rid of the burden by trying hard to do less sin or to do more good. But with every wrong action, the burden increases and increases. With every failure to do good, the burden gets heavier and heavier. Yet we say to ourselves and anyone who will listen, “I’m okay. I can handle this,” right before the burden of sin crushes us.

God promised relief from this burden and a solution to this mess by sending the Messiah. But what role would the Messiah play? For many Jews at the time of Jesus, the expectation was of a mighty king or a righteous judge. While this may sound good, such a Messiah would only make the situation worse for us. A mighty king comes to defeat and kill his enemies. By our sin, we are enemies of God. A righteous judge comes to judge and punish offenders. By our sin, we are offenders against God. This is why many people thought that John the Baptist was the Messiah: he was preaching justice and judgment.

One day, when John saw Jesus coming to him, said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Here, in this short declaration, John delivers relief for the great burden of sin to his generation and to our generation. He says very clearly what kind of Messiah the people then and now could expect.

Jesus, the Messiah and Savior of the world, came, not as a mighty King or as a righteous Judge, but as a Lamb. A lamb is not powerful like a king nor forceful as a judge. A lamb is weak and

innocent. A lamb is a victim and sacrifice. A lamb is an animal for sacrifice for sin. Jesus did not come as a king. Jesus did not come as a judge. Jesus came solely as a sacrifice.

Jesus is the Lamb of God. He is not our sacrifice which we present to God. As sinful human beings, we have absolutely nothing to offer God in exchange for our freedom from sin and release from death. Any and all good that we may do is tainted by our sin and unacceptable to a holy God. Therefore, God Himself came up with the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Jesus is the Lamb of God “who takes away the sin.” He doesn’t take away the symptoms of our sin which plague us. He doesn’t stop the results of our sin which cause us so much suffering. Instead, Jesus attacks the root of the problem, sin itself. According to the literal meaning of the Greek word here, Jesus “picks up and carries away” sin. Jesus takes the burden of sin upon Himself and carries that sin to a cross. Although the world at that time saw Jesus being executed as a criminal, He was, in fact, being sacrificed for sin.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin “of the world.” Here is where it gets personal. Jesus did not pick up and carry away only the sins of the Jews or only the sins of the people of that time. Jesus picked up and carried away the sin of the world – all people of all places of all time. The grace of God is not limited by time or space. No one is excluded.

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” for you. Jesus is the Lamb sent by God for you. Jesus picked up and carried away your sins to the cross where He paid the sacrifice for you with His life. And Jesus is the only sacrifice who returned from the dead to live again. Therefore, Jesus has freed you from the heavy burden of sin and death and has replaced it with His holiness and His life.

How do we respond? On the second day of our text, John was standing with two of his disciples when he saw Jesus coming again. John says the same thing as he did the day before, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” However, this time, John says it for a different reason. On the day before, John spoke these words to testify of who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do. He is the Son of God and Messiah who came to take upon Himself the sin of the world. Now, as John stands with two men who were intent on following him, John speaks these words again: “Behold, the Lamb of God!” In other words, “Look! There is the one you should follow, not me. He is the one who will relieve you of your burden, not me.” The two disciples, Andrew and possibly John, immediately left John the Baptist to follow Jesus. Andrew went and got his brother, Simon Peter, and brought him to Jesus.

It works the same way today. Pastors and other servants of the church have the wonderful privilege of pointing out the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The temptation, whether it’s John the Baptist, a pastor, or anyone else is for the messenger to draw attention to himself. There exists in many churches a “cult of personality” wherein it seems all of the attention goes to the preacher. The church may even be named after the preacher: “John Smith Ministries”. Jesus is either forgotten or plays a minor role in the whole thing.

My goal in proclaiming the work of Jesus for you is not to draw honor to me or receive glory for good sermons or interesting Bible classes, but to point you to Jesus, not to me. The point of all of my sermons and all of our Bible classes could be summed up in the words of John the Baptist: Behold – Look – there is the *Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. There is the one who will take away your burden, not just relieve the symptoms. He takes it away so that you no longer need to bear it. There is forgiveness, life, and salvation. Behold – Look – *he* is the one, not me. Therefore, follow him to find relief. Follow him to lose your burden. Follow him to everlasting life.

No one enjoys carrying around a five-hundred-pound slab of rock on their shoulders. It will crush you. It will kill you. Likewise, no one enjoys carrying around an oppressive burden of sin, guilt, and death. Those things will crush you. Those things will kill you. Remember the gracious invitation of Jesus: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-29) look to the Lamb of God. In Him, there is relief from all burdens, forgiveness for all sins, and rest for your souls. Amen