

Behold the Lamb of God

“Behold the Lamb of God” was the declaration of John the Baptist, the messenger sent by God, “Before the face of the Lord”. John went on to say *“That takes away the sin of the world”*. It is the understanding which God has of sin which makes this comment of John so important. John also speaks that God told him that *“The one on whom he saw the Spirit descend is the same one who would also baptise with the Holy Ghost”*. We have therefore from John, God’s official messenger, two statements which declare the two great works of Jesus Christ and sum up His ministry.

Sin needs to be taken away. That is God’s opinion and Jesus was sent to do just that. The existence of sin and the damage it has and does cause is, perhaps, one of the most misunderstood truths of the whole Bible, and why there is so much misunderstanding of God Himself. It is God’s understanding of sin, and its effect on human lives, which makes Him so radical in His dealings with human beings when they sin, and even His own Son when Jesus was made sin. In the Old Testament we find a story of a man going out and gathering sticks for the fire on the Sabbath day. “Not a heinous crime” you may say, “It is not murder or adultery”. Such an activity was directly against the commandments of God and it was also against the Mosaic Law; you were not to light your fire on the Sabbath day. In these days, surely, such a person in Israel would not even be brought before the courts. When Moses asked God what was to happen to the man, God said that he must be killed, and they took up stones and executed the “Stick gatherer”. “Pretty ruthless and hard”, you may say, of the supposedly loving God. Where is the mercy? The truth is that God saw the consequences of this man’s actions and, if he had been allowed to get away with it, the next Sabbath many more people would have been out gathering sticks. The disobedience would have spread like wild fire and the reason for, and the whole blessing of, the Sabbath day would have been undermined. The Sabbath was to be a day when the people of Israel were given time to spend worshipping God away from work. They would then be able to maintain their thanks and trust in the God who had given them the land, and was providing for all their needs. It was to be a day of rest. God had entered into His rest and wanted His people to be in the same position as He was, as a basis of the fellowship between them.

Paul, the apostle, writes to the Romans *“The wages of sin is death”*, that is the payback for sin. It is really more about spiritual death than physical, but with the man with the sticks, the wages, or the payback, was actually seen in physical terms.

When the children of Israel had entered the “Promised land” there was a need for victory after victory to overcome, and deal with, all those who had lived in the land before. Those nations had done some pretty awful things, spiritually and physically, and they were to be destroyed. None were to remain which might cause wrong and bad influences upon the children of Israel and, to put it bluntly, cause them to sin. The capture of the city of Ai was to be a pretty easy military operation. The victory at Jericho had been very straightforward, in fact it had been quite amazing, and the same sort of triumph was expected at the little city of Ai. However, the children of Israel were defeated and men were killed. The reason: a man called Achan (Achan means trouble) who had taken some items during the previous victory which he was forbidden to take. It was just the same in principle as Adam taking and eating fruit he was forbidden to take. God told the children of Israel not to take anything, or have any part of that, which belonged to the nations which lived in Canaan. The wealth

of those nations had been gained by corrupt means and much was part of their idolatry and worship of false gods. Paul told the Corinthians *"Touch not the unclean thing"* and this principle applied to the people of Israel when they went into Canaan. So Achan disobeyed; he did not take a lot of things, but it was the principle that mattered, and that little undermined the whole standing and position of Israel before God, on whom they were dependent for their victory. There was *"Sin in the camp"*, or Israel had sinned. Just one man had disobeyed, but it affected the whole nation. Achan was identified as the culprit and his whole family were rapidly executed, the sin was put away, and Israel went on to victory at Ai. Jesus talked about *"A little leaven leavens the whole lump"*. In truth, with hindsight, what Achan did was complete madness. He would have been given a possession in the "Promised land", a piece of land which would have remained the property of his descendants forever. He forsook that possibility for just a few small items of temporary value. In many ways that is what sin is like; it persuades people to do things for short term gain, but at their loss eternally.

All odd you may think; why not allow the man to survive and put away the items he took? But his action had led to the death of 36 people and undermined the confidence of the whole nation. They had gone into "panic mode" at the defeat, believing that God was not able to give them victory and they were therefore in the nightmare scenario of not being able to overcome in their battles. The fear of being wiped out as a nation became, Oh so very real to them.

How many people have such fears and panics in their lives? "Everything is going to fall apart". The blame very quickly gets put on to God; even Joshua, the great leader, did that and started asking God questions about what He thought He was doing. The problem was sin, God saw it, Joshua did not, but the problem was not with God, His ability or His faithfulness, it was with the people. Perhaps Christians do not realise the seriousness of sin and make light of it too. They fail to be aware that it undermines the whole of their spiritual lives and leads them into weakness, failure and trouble in their lives. Achan, trouble his name, and trouble he brought; that is exactly what sin does. If we sin we must confess it to God immediately and allow His forgiveness and cleansing to take place.

So God was pretty ruthless with Achan and the "Sticks gatherer", but in doing so maintained the integrity and righteousness of His people and their relationship with Him, and therefore the blessings that came from being right with God. We can read of the blessings and the curses which applied to Israel in the book of Deuteronomy. To receive the blessing all the Israelites had to do was to obey the commandments. These could be summed up, as Jesus did, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself". "Pretty straightforward", you may think, but never achieved, except of course in Jesus Christ, who laid down His life for His friends. The law we are told, in the book of Galatians, was given to *"Shut us up to faith"*; to try and reduce sin. It was to be a *"Schoolmaster to lead us to Christ"*. God was always trying to show the way forward, to lead His people away from their wrongdoing, for their own good. What a joy it was when David was King. We are told he was *"A man after God's own heart"* and when David was in control there was victory and peace on every side. That was just the way God had intended it to be, and the way for us too, having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. In the world we may have trials and temptations but *"Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"*. That overcoming should, and must, work out through our faith enabling us to trust the Lord in all things. Through that faith the triumph and victory comes in our lives. It has even been seen in the martyrs, down the centuries, who have even overcome in death. *"This is that which overcomes the world, even our faith"*.

If we move away from the history of Israel, but taking the lessons learnt with us, we can look at Jesus' words about forgiveness. *"When you stand praying, forgive"* (Mark 11: 24-26); have nothing in your heart against anyone else to keep your access to God completely clear. Jesus says, if you forgive, God will forgive you, the implication being, if you will not forgive, God will not forgive you. Again, "Pretty tough" you might say; where is the God of love and mercy? Actually right there with the truth; unforgiveness is in itself sin, and if it is held in the heart, then it is impossible for God to forgive, or take away, that which you are holding on to. Our opening paragraph talks of taking away the sin of the whole world, but if people will not let their sin go, then it cannot be taken away. Often, the unwillingness to let go is based in pride and stubbornness, not being prepared to admit our need.

The phrase *"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us"* is known by so many people worldwide in the Lord's Prayer. That

is how Jesus taught us to pray, and we are unwise to ignore the principles He laid down. So if we won't forgive, God can't forgive us; not that He does not want to, but, just as we have said, if we hold on to the sin, God cannot take it away. He sees it, of course, just like He saw the items hidden in Achan's tent and that is why it affects our relationship with Him.

How often do we hear the words of the bitter heart, unforgiving and resentful, with so much hardness in the voice and the attitude? Hebrews warns us against having *"A root of bitterness whereby many are defiled"* Defiled means unclean, full of sin and just not acceptable to a righteous God. God longs to gather us as *"A hen gathers her chicks"* but, like Jerusalem, we won't, because we hold on to the bitterness which spoils everything; truly the wages of sin is death. The slow spiritual decline in the unforgiving and unrepentant heart is apparent for all to see. The book of Hebrews tells us to *"Exhort one another daily, lest our hearts are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"*. We therefore see exactly what sin can do to the human heart. It hardens that heart, that is the deception. The more we sin, the harder the heart becomes, and as a result it becomes increasingly less sensitive to the promptings of God to recognise the sin, to repent of it, and ask for His forgiveness.

The Apostle Peter in his letter advises those to whom he writes, *"Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"*. If we look at this phrase a little more closely, we see that the lusts of the flesh, those things which are desired in the flesh and the mind, actually fight against our souls. Maybe this is difficult to understand, but each of us has a soul; it is the God breathed part of us, and is very susceptible to damage. As we've seen, when we have unforgiveness the heart is hardened, it is the same with all the lusts of the flesh. These could perhaps be expressed as natural desires or "going after the things we want"; they also cause hardness of the heart. There is a requirement in committing sin to go against the conscience, and that action produces a hardening in the conscience. Peter uses the phrase "Warring against the soul" and the word warring comes from having an army encamped against you. This is spiritual opposition to your soul and its development. Your fleshly lusts oppose the development of your soul. It could be said that you oppose yourself, as any war causes damage to people and property. Fleshly lusts do exactly that, they cause damage to the person, to you and your soul, if you let lust or sin reign in your body.

Right back in the beginning God warned Adam, *"In the day that you sin you will die"*. Perhaps Adam did not understand, as he had no concept of sin at that time. What he was told was; if you do

something against the commandments of God, it will have consequences in your life. Therefore do what you are asked to do; you can eat of all the other trees in the garden, but just not this one. It was not that God was mean, but just that He wanted to prevent the eternal damage which would come to Adam if he disobeyed. It was only after Adam had taken and eaten the forbidden fruit that the consequences of his action became tragically apparent. Yes, he could see and understand, but what he saw and understood, rather than being good for him, had the opposite effect, and caused him to hide away from the God who had made him and blessed him. Adam had a conscience, which told him that what he had done was wrong. The spiritual death was immediate; there was separation from God, and almost immediately Adam was put out of the garden and started a life of toil and difficulty. The physical death came at a much, much later time, but as a result of sin the life expectancy of humans has decreased over the centuries. The one certain thing in all our lives, in spite of all the best efforts of the doctors, is that we will all die.

Paul, the apostle, told the Roman Church that the death which came upon Adam has passed on to all human beings. This is the verse in Romans chapter five, *"Wherefore, by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"*.

The spiritual death, the separation from God, is in each human life right from the moment of birth. King David, after the sin of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and his murder, by proxy, of Uriah, repents. We can read his prayer in Psalm 51; his comment, *"In sin did my mother conceive me"*. David

understood exactly what his sin was like when pointed out to him, through Nathan the prophet. *"You are that man"* says Nathan, and David suddenly realises exactly what he's done, and what he's like. The physical death which we all experience comes later, none of us knows how long we will live, but our physical death is the consequence of our spiritual death. All through our lives, if we are honest, we are aware of the corruption within our bodies, causing us to age and reducing our natural strength as we get older. Surely it is pretty obvious to anyone that the principle of sin and death is working out in every human body? There should not be any argument about the reality of such corruption and the nature of sin and death which causes it. The promise is for Christians, with Christ in them, that the *"Same Spirit which raised Christ from the dead shall quicken, or put life into, their mortal bodies"*. This enables the power of God to be working even in our natural bodies when we belong to the Lord Jesus.

It seems, in spite of having all the evidence even in our own beings, very few people actually seek a solution to the sin working within them. Can there be any doubt of the need of the human heart? Perhaps the reality is that sin has already deceived human beings, and hardened their hearts so much, that they cannot see the truth of what is actually working in their own beings. Surely that is why the evolutionists are so insistent that God does not exist. Their minds have been so blinded by the sin in the human heart that they cannot know God and therefore insist He does not exist. This, rather than understand that their inability to see God is because of the spiritual blindness caused by sin in their hearts.

Perhaps we can understand, when sin causes so much damage, why God is so firm about dealing with it and firm in His resolve to remove it from the lives of His people. Maybe, from the examples above, when we see the consequences of sin in the Children of Israel and in King David himself, we can understand why God was so tough with those who sinned and who undermined His authority.

Perhaps we can see why the murderers, the adulterers, and above all, the idolaters had to be removed from amongst God's people, and understand why fire came out and destroyed Nadab and Abihu when they offered up *"Strange fire to the Lord"*, and why the ground opened up to swallow Dothan and his allies when they rebelled against the Lord.

However we do, of course, see the care of the Lord when he appeared on Mount Sinai and instructed Moses to make sure that no one came too close, in case fire came out and destroyed them. We also read that the Lord continued to provide for the children of Israel in spite of their sin and, at the request of Moses, still remained among the people as they travelled in the wilderness, and eventually into the "Promised Land". We also see how, when serpents came among the people to destroy them, a brazen serpent was created to which they could "look and live".

So there is hope; Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world. There is an answer, a solution, someone else who can take away the sin which causes all the trouble. Jesus himself said that as *"Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be lifted up"* and *"If I be lifted up I will draw all men to myself"*. Rather than have a brazen serpent, there was to be a man, but in many ways much more than a man; the Son of God, Jesus Christ himself, the Word made flesh. Jesus it is who takes away our sin and was God's Lamb for the sin of the whole world. He it was who was raised up on the cross, and to whom we are to "look and live", and find deliverance from the mortal wound of sin.

If we go back for a moment into the Old Testament we find there the sin offering. It was to take away the sin, an animal in the place of the person who had sinned. The animal took the death and the judgement, being an offering to remove that sin. Jesus Christ is our sin offering, taking the place of everyone in the whole world, taking the judgement and death, an offering to remove the sin of the whole world. How wonderful! In the book of Hebrews it tells us that, *"The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins"*. All the Old Testament sacrifices could never satisfy the requirement of a Holy God, but the blood of Jesus Christ truly cleanses us from all our sin. Hallelujah. This is possibly the most fundamental doctrine in the whole of evangelical Christianity, whatever denomination a Christian comes from, he or she will believe that it is the blood of Jesus Christ shed for many, shed for them, which is the means of washing away their sin, and the basis of the forgiveness they receive from Almighty God.

A few verses from Matthew, chapter 15, help us to look at what Jesus was saying when explaining the origin of sin.

¹⁷*Do you not yet understand, that whatsoever enters in at the mouth goes into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?*

¹⁸*But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man (human being)*

¹⁹*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*

²⁰*These are the things which defile a man (human being): but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man (human being).*

There is a list in verse 19, which more or less covers all the breaches of the 10 commandments, so breaking the law of God. You are not to kill, you will not commit adultery, or lie or steal or covet, (covetousness is like idolatry), or even speak blasphemy. Blasphemy is speaking about God in derogatory terms. It is taking His name in vain and demonstrates a lack of love for God, whom we are to love with all our hearts etc. How can we speak badly of someone we love? Jesus said these things, "Come out of the heart of a man". Sin clearly is something that defiles; it makes someone unclean in the sight of God, and it comes out of the heart. These things are all actions; however the Lord Jesus said that *"If someone looks on a woman to lust after her, he has already committed adultery in his heart"*. We therefore see that when sin is identified, not only are our actions included, but also the attitudes of our hearts and minds. We can clearly see that there are certain actions and attitudes of heart which we call sins. In our list we have murder and adultery and lying, covetousness and so on; these if you like are the fruit of the tree. They are the sins which are the manifestation of the nature of sin in the heart. The Lord Jesus says that these things come out of the heart; the heart therefore itself must contain sin, probably more accurately be sin, to produce sins. The Apostle James tells us; *"You cannot get pure water and bad water from the same source"*. An apple tree produces apples, a mango tree produces mangoes; the principle is as straightforward as that. Right in the beginning God made every plant to produce seed after its own kind, which means it will produce a plant of exactly the same sort. So sin produces sin and righteousness produces righteousness.

So we have to look at how Jesus deals with sin and with sins. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and chapter five we read these words.

¹⁹*To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

²⁰*Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

²¹*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

In the last verse we are told that God actually made Jesus Christ to be sin for us. Jesus did not know sin, he had never committed sin or been acquainted with its operation, in the whole of His life. Nevertheless God actually made Jesus into the very nature of sin, which had entered into the heart of Adam in the beginning, and had caused sin and death to pass on to all human beings. In addition Galatians 1.4 says *"Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father"*. Therefore we have two operations, the latter dealing with the sins committed by human beings and the damage they have caused; the former deals with the very nature of the sin itself which produces the sins. In our passage in 2 Corinthians 5 it tells us that God does not impute our trespasses, (our

sins), where we cross the line, against us because Jesus Christ has reconciled us to God. So in His death Jesus Christ dealt with both sin and sins; no wonder the book of Hebrews can state *"By one offering He has perfected for ever those who are sanctified (set apart for God)"*.

The word reconciliation means to thoroughly change. What it means is that since the work of the

Lord Jesus things are not left the same; that is as far as our human nature is concerned. (In fact everything has changed through Jesus' work, and all the principalities and powers are subject to Him. So is sickness, and all the ordinances against us.) So *"God was in Christ Jesus reconciling the whole world to Himself"*. This gives the potential for every human being in the whole world to be reconciled to God. Anyone can have their old nature removed, i.e. the heart, or nature, in them which was at enmity with God both in operation and attitude, and receive a new nature. This new nature, or new man, is *"Created in righteousness and true holiness"*. Paul therefore can say to us *"If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creation, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new"*, and also, *"The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death"*. Jesus Christ Himself tells us *"You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free"*. The scriptures lead us to an understanding that the work of Jesus Christ is about re-creation, about regeneration, a making new and the changing of nature in the human heart. *"Old things are passed away, all things are become new"* is the declaration. This is Biblical Christianity, this is the freedom from sin which Jesus Christ came to bring. His comment, *"If the Son shall make you free, then you shall be free indeed"*.

Of course, in addition, the sins which we have committed are washed away and forgiven. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, goes on keeping us clean from sin. It could be mentioned here that fornication is *"a sin against the body"* and although forgivable, still has an effect, until that body dies. That is why we are told to flee from fornication, as there is a physical union with our flesh in any physical relationship between a man and a woman. Whether it is even with a prostitute, any fornication or adultery is the same; any brief relationship still produces *"one flesh"*. These sins are forgivable and redeemable, but will not be resolved ultimately until death comes. That does not mean that such an act, once confessed to God, is not forgiven and can be completely marginalised in a life which is lived in holiness unto God. Such an action should therefore not hinder fellowship with the Lord Jesus in any life. The warning in the scripture is there for us to take careful notice of. This is to ensure that we do not endanger our spiritual lives by any such foolish action, in committing some form of physical uncleanness. *"Godliness with contentment is great gain"*.

The requirements for obtaining the removal of sin, and the washing away of sins, are given to us by the Apostle John in his first epistle.

⁷*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.*

⁸*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

⁹*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

¹⁰*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

The need is to recognise our sin and its nature and allow Jesus Christ to *"cleanse us from all our unrighteousness"*. We also need to confess our sins; *"God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins"*. It is all about being honest, and when we are honest we find that God is always faithful to forgive our sins. Never is there a time when God will not forgive, when we come to Him on the basis of what the Lord Jesus has done, and ask for mercy. That is a huge relief to anyone; God does not discriminate but is faithful to all. He is also just in His action when removing sin. Romans chapter three tells us;

²³*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

²⁴*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*

²⁵*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*

²⁶*To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

God declares His righteousness because Jesus is our propitiation, our mercy seat (or place of mercy), for our sins; therefore sins can be remitted. Jesus took the judgment and the wrath of God upon himself, therefore all judgment is passed, all sin is resolved. God is therefore just, fair, and right and righteous, to forgive us and justify us from all our sins. Everything is justly sorted. To go back to the verses in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, which we looked at earlier, we read *“That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”*. We therefore understand that the very righteousness of God is ours, and we are made that righteousness even **in Jesus Christ**. So for this to work and be real and practical, we have to be **in Him**.

So how do we get into Him? This is the work of the Holy Spirit when He baptises us into the death of Jesus Christ. This is the place where Jesus was joined with us; He was made sin for us on the cross. We therefore must be joined with Him in His death, to be in His resurrection and therefore in His life.

The Holy Spirit does exactly what is true and right as far as God is concerned; spiritually He puts us right into Jesus' death. That is where we were reconciled to God, and when we are **in Him**, His righteousness is ours. We are cleansed from all unrighteousness and therefore free to serve the Lord, to quote Mary, *“In holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives”*. Paul exhorts the Romans on the basis of this spiritual baptism into the death of Jesus Christ, *“Reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ”*. We are then told not to yield our members unto unrighteousness and sin, but rather to yield our members to God as *“Instruments of righteousness”*. We must not let sin reign in our mortal bodies, but yield unto the righteousness of God created in us in Jesus Christ. We must obey Him in our lives, bringing forth fruit to God, the end being everlasting life.

We have now moved on to the basis of truth and a real understanding of the work of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Rather than seeing God as a tyrant and a bully in his dealing with sinners, we see Him as a God of mercy and love. Paul tells us *“God who is rich in mercy and with the great love wherewith He loved us, when we were dead in trespasses and sins, has quickened us together with Christ”*.

Sin had to be dealt with; it destroys lives and ruins human souls. It causes wars and strife and pain and trouble. It damages relationships between human beings, separates us from the living God, so that we cannot have fellowship with Him and, above all, sends us to a lost eternity. We have looked at some of the damage sin causes and why, before Jesus came, sinners had to be dealt with radically. We have seen also why there was a law under which Israel was to live, to try and contain that sin. The law failed because it was weak through the flesh, and was unable to be the means of grace for Israel. The people just did not obey the commandments. There was nothing wrong with the law, it was just that sin in the heart prevented the obedience required.

But now Jesus Christ is come there is a new way, a living way, a way of freedom from the power of sin. There is a new law available for our lives; it is called the *“Law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus”*. It is a spiritual law which is brought into our hearts when we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

This law comes in the power of the Holy Spirit when He enters into us and baptises us into Jesus Christ. This new law, or spiritual principle, is now free to operate in our lives and in our souls. If we walk in the Spirit we will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. Those desires which warred against our souls are kept under control and are no longer allowed to afflict us. We find an ability to love and forgive, to be kind, to be patient and longsuffering. We have an ability to put God first, and serve Him above all other things.

Jesus Christ has become our life and we must find, and should find, His nature, His righteousness, working in every part of our lives as we yield our members as instruments unto God, for His glory.

This is the wonder of the gospel, Jesus Christ has become our Saviour. No longer are we to be the victims of sin, but those people, Christians, who live in triumph serving the Lord Jesus, rejoicing in our hearts that ever there was *"A Lamb who took away the sin of the whole world"*.