

“THE LAMB OF GOD”

“Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.”

John 1:29

BEFORE we plunge into our main subject, it is necessary to notice what is implied in our text, which is that “the world” was lost through sin and that all mankind had become guilty before God. You, therefore, my dear Hearer, are one of those who are thus guilty. Though you may never have broken the laws of your country, nor even the rules of propriety. Though you may be both amiable and admirable in your general deportment, yet, for all this, as “there is none righteous, no, not one,” you, also, are included among the unrighteous! It matters not what religious professions you may have made, or what outward forms of godliness you may have observed—unless you have a better righteousness than your own, you are a lost sinner! I believe there is now present a Brother who, when he was first convicted of sin, tried hard to make himself a better man under the mistaken idea that this was the way of salvation. And when, one Sabbath night, he heard me say that all the reforms you could ever make upon your old nature would be useless as to the matter of salvation, but that, “you must be born-again,” he felt very angry and made a vow that he would never be found listening to me again! Yet here he is, rejoicing that the Lord has taught him to see himself as a lost, ruined sinner and to put his heart’s trust in Jesus Christ, the sinner’s Savior!

It is very likely that if I had time to explain to you, my Hearer, the fullness of your sin and the utter ruin of your natural state, you, also, would grow angry. You would have no cause to be angry, for all that I could say would fall far short of the truth about your real condition in the sight of God! And it is most solemnly important for you to know that however high you may stand in the ranks of merely moral men, you are a lost soul and a condemned soul, as long as you remain without living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! If you are angry with the minister of the Gospel who tells you this Truth of God, you are as foolish as a certain Brahmin whom I have heard of. His religion consisted chiefly in not eating any animal food or destroying any kind of life. The missionary told him that it was impossible for him to carry out such a “religion” as that, “for,” he said, “in every drop of water that you drink, you swallow thousands of animals and so destroy vast quantities of animal life.” Then he put a drop of water out of the cup from which the Brahmin had been drinking, under his microscope and so convinced him of the truth of what he had said. When the Brahmin saw the creatures moving in the water, instead of abandoning his false theory, he grew very angry and dashed the microscope upon the ground! He was not angry, you see, with the fact. Like the lazy housemaid who said she was quite sure that she always kept the rooms clean but, it was the nasty sun that would shine in and make everything look so dusty! The fault is not in the Gospel which we preach—so you should not be angry with it, or with us—the fault is in yourselves, in your own hearts and lives, and if you do not like to be told the truth about sin, it is a sure sign that your heart is not right in the sight of God! It is still true that “everyone that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d.”

Well then, with that Truth of God taken for granted—that you, whom I am now addressing, have sinned and are, therefore, under God’s condemnation unless you are trusting in Christ—we now come directly to our text. We shall take it not merely as though John the Baptist were speaking it, but as we may now use it from our point of view. It appears to me to be the whole Gospel in a very brief form. You may sometimes write much in a very few words and here you have an epitome of the whole Gospel of God in these few syllables—“Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.” I am going to ask and try to answer three questions. First, what is to be beheld? And thirdly, why should we do this?

1. First, then WHAT IS TO BE BEHELD?

The text mentions a Lamb, by which is meant a sacrifice. Under the Jewish Law, those who had offended brought sacrifices and offered them to God. These sacrifices were representations of our Lord Jesus Christ who is, “the Lamb of God.” Listen, my dear Hearer, and I will tell you the

Gospel in a few sentences. As God is just, it is inevitable that sin should be punished. If He would pardon you, how can this be righteously accomplished? Only thus—Jesus Christ, His Son, came to earth and stood in the place of all those who believe on Him and God accepted Him as the substitutionary Sacrifice for all those who put their trust in Him. Under the Jewish Law, the lamb was put to death that the man might not be put to death and, in like manner, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, suffered the pangs of death by crucifixion and the greater agony of the wrath of God that we might not suffer the pangs of Hell and the eternal wrath which is due to sin. There is no other way of salvation under Heaven but this! God cannot relax His Justice and He will by no means clear the guilty. But He laid upon Christ the full punishment that was due to sin and smote Him as though He had been the actual offender, and now, turning round to you, He tells you that if you trust in Jesus, the merits of His great atoning Sacrifice shall be imputed to you and you shall live forever in Glory because Jesus died upon the Cross of Calvary. If any of you would have your sins forgiven, and so enjoy peace with God, you must look by faith to that Sacrifice which was offered upon Calvary and keep your eyes of faith fixed there—and sooner or later you will certainly receive the blessings of peace into your souls!

But the text not only mentions a Lamb, it says, “Behold the Lamb of God,” and I draw your special attention to that expression. It is not merely a Sacrifice to which you are to look, but the Sacrifice that God has appointed and ordained to be the one and only Sacrifice for sin! This is an all-important point. “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all...It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, He has put Him to grief.” If Christ had not been sent of God to be the Savior of sinners, our faith would have had no firm foundation to rest upon. But as God Himself has set forth Christ to be the Propitiation for human guilt, then He cannot reject the sinner who accepts that Propitiation! I need not raise any questions as to whether Christ’s Atonement is sufficient, for God says that it is and as He is satisfied with the Sacrifice offered by His only-begotten and well-beloved Son, surely the most troubled conscience may be equally satisfied with it! Your offense, my Friend, was committed against God. If, then, God is content with what Christ has done on your behalf, and so is willing to pardon you, surely you need not enquire any further, but with gratitude you should at once accept the reconciliation which Christ has made! It is “the Lamb of God” whom I have to bid you, “behold.” It is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on Calvary, “the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” It was God who appointed Him to die as the Substitute for sinners. It was God who accepted this Sacrifice when He died and now, Jehovah, Himself, speaking from His Throne of Glory, says to the sinner, “Believe on My Son whom I have set forth as the Propitiation for human sin. Trust in Him and you shall be eternally saved.”

Still further, to bring out the full force of the text, notice the next words, “Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.” When Jesus Christ was put into our place, our sin was laid upon Him and sin, like anything else, cannot be in two places at one time. If, then, I, being a Believer in Jesus, know that all my sin was laid upon Christ, it necessarily follows that I have no sin left upon me! It has become Christ’s burden. He has taken it away from me. “Yes,” you say, “but then the sin is still on Christ.” Ah, but my Hearers, if our Lord Jesus Christ, “Himself bore our sins in His own body up on the tree,” He there endured all the punishment that was due to us, or an equivalent for it, and those sins were by that means put away—that is to say, they ceased to be—so they do not exist any longer! All my indebtedness to God was transferred to Christ and He paid all my debts! Then where are my debts now? Why, there are none! They are all gone forever. This is what Christ does for everyone who truly trusts in Him—He takes that man’s sins absolutely out of existence so that they cease to be! Christ has accomplished the great work described to Daniel by the angel Gabriel—He has finished the transgression, made an end of sins—what a strong expression that is!—made reconciliation for iniquity and brought in everlasting righteousness! How gloriously He has put sin right away for all who believe in Him! “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Of all sinners in the whole world who believe in Jesus Christ, it may be truly said that all their sins are gone past all recall—God has cast them into the depths of the Red Sea of the Savior’s blood and they shall not be remembered against them any more forever! It is thus that the Lamb of God takes or bears away sin!

But whose sin does He take away. “By this expression I believe is intended the sinworld who come to Jesus and put their trust in Him! He has so taken away “the sin of the world” that every sinner

in the world who will come to Him and trust in Him, shall have all his sins put away forever! Whether he is Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Barbarian or Scythian, bond or free, if he truly believes in Jesus, it is certain that Christ took all his sins away. Whether he was born 1800 years ago, or whether he shall be born in the ages that are yet to come, does not make any difference to this fact—Christ has borne his sins if he trusts in Jesus as his own Savior. This is the sign and token by which he may assuredly know that he has a saving and eternal interest in the precious blood of Jesus—“He that believes on Him is not condemned.” The gate of Divine Grace is set very wide open in our text—if it were not, some poor sinners would be afraid to enter! “Oh,” asks one, “is this mercy for me?” Well, Friend, I will ask you a question—will you trust Christ? Will you come to Him this very moment and take the mercy that He freely presents to all who will accept it? If so, I am sure that it is yours—as sure as I am that it is mine!

Possibly someone has come in here tonight hoping to hear something new, but I have nothing new to tell, nor do I wish ever to have anything more new than this—“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Or this, “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” When Dr. Judson went home to America from Burma, there was a large congregation gathered together and they requested the returned missionary, the veteran of so many years of service, to address the assembly. He stood up and simply told the story that I have again told you tonight—the story of Christ suffering in the place of sinners and of Christ saving all who trust Him. Then he sat down and one who sat next to him said to him, “I am afraid the friends are rather disappointed—they expected to hear something interesting from you.” He said, “I have spoken to them to the best of my ability upon the most interesting subject in the whole world! What could I have done better than that?” “Yes,” said the other, “but after having been so long abroad, they thought that you would tell them some interesting story. They did not think you would come all the way from Burma just to tell them only that.” The missionary then rose and said, “I should like to go home feeling that although I have come all the way from Burma, I do not know anything that I can tell you that I think is half as good for you to hear, or half as interesting, as the story of the love of Christ in dying to save sinners.”

The good doctor was right and I feel just as he did—that there is nothing so interesting as the story of the Cross! You need to hear it, you who are already saved. And you need to hear it, you who are not yet saved! You must hear it, for there is no hope of salvation for you except as faith shall come to you by hearing—and especially hearing that portion of the Word of God which deals most closely with the Cross of Christ!

One night, a dissolving-view lecture upon the Holy Land was being given and, as the audience, sitting in darkness, looked at a picture of Jerusalem, they were startled by a voice asking, “Where is Calvary?” Ah, and that is the question that many of you need to ask—“Where is Calvary?” There must you turn your eyes where, between the two thieves, your Savior died. If you really look to Him as He dies there for guilty sinners, you are saved! And then whatever else you do not know, you know enough to save you, for you are wise unto eternal life! May the Lord graciously make you thus wise through the effectual working of His ever-blessed Spirit! So then, God in human flesh, the Divinely-appointed Sacrifice for human guilt, “the Lamb of God,” is what you are bid, in our text, to “behold.”

II. But now, secondly, WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

How are we to have a part and lot in that great Sacrifice which Christ offered on Calvary? The answer of the text is, “Behold”.—

“There is life in a look at the Crucified One!”

“Behold the Lamb of God” means believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, trust in Him as your Savior, accept God’s Revelation concerning Him and rely upon Him to save you. This is the way of salvation!

Notice how opposed this is to the idea that we are critically to understand the Doctrines of the Gospel before we can be saved. How many persons there are who want to know this and to understand that! They come to us and say, "Here are two texts that do not seem, to us, to square with one another, and there are those two Doctrines of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility which do not appear to be consistent with each other. Must we understand all the mysteries before we can be saved?" O foolish people! They remind me of one who is shipwrecked and who, as the lifeboat comes up to the sinking ship, or to the spar upon which he is floating, says to the captain, "Before I can get on board that lifeboat, I want to know the exact number of planks there are in it. And I really do not think that knowing that would content me—I would also like to know how many rivets and bolts there are in the boat. And I also need to know what is the theory of the operation of the oars upon the waves and how it is that boats are propelled." If a man ever did talk thus, I am pretty sure that the captain of the lifeboat would exclaim, "What a fool that man is! He is in danger of drowning, yet he talks like this! Come into the boat at once, or we must leave you to perish!" And I also feel that you unconverted sinners have no business to set yourselves up as critics of the Word of God! There is something much simpler than that for you to do—and the text bids you do it—"Behold the Lamb of God." Do not sit down to manufacture difficulties—"believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." There are various ways of using a piece of bread. One man may take it and employ it in rubbing out the pencil marks which he has made upon a sheet of paper. Another man may take it to an analyst and ask him to see how much alum the baker may have put into it. But the really hungry man—the one who gets the most good out of the piece of bread—eats it! And that is what I recommend you to do with the Gospel—not begin to turn it about this way and that, not ask all manner of questions concerning it—but feed upon it! And the way to feed upon it is to accept it, believe it and especially to put your trust in Jesus Christ, who is the very Essence of the Gospel!

"Behold the Lamb of God," says the text—then that command is opposed to the question that troubles so many—whether they are elect or not! That is like wanting to read Hebrew before one has learned to speak English! Such people are not content to learn the A B C, the elements, the rudiments of the Gospel, first—they first want to know the Gospel's classics, or mathematics, or metaphysics—but that cannot be! During the recent hard frosts I have struck up an acquaintance with a little friend who, I am afraid, may desert me, by-and-by, but our friendship has been exceedingly pleasant to each of us thus far. On the little balcony outside my study windows, I observed a robin frequently coming, so I took an opportunity, one morning, to put some crumbs there and I have done the same thing every morning since. And my little feathered friend comes close up to the window frame and picks up the crumbs. And I do not perceive that he has any difficulty about whether the crumbs were laid there for him, or whether I had any electing love towards him in my heart. There were the crumbs—he needed them and he picked them up and ate them! And I can tell you that in doing so, he exactly fulfilled my purpose in putting the crumbs there! I thought that he acted very wisely and I think that if a poor sinner wants mercy—and he sees that there is mercy to be had—he had better not pause to ask, "Did God decree me to have it?" But go on and take it and he will then find that in doing so, he is fulfilling God's decree! My little robin friend is very wise in his way, for he has called a friend of his to join him at the feast on the balcony. How he did it, I do not know, but he managed to tell a blackbird all about the crumbs—and he brought him last Friday morning to see them for himself. The blackbird was rather shy at first, and stood for a while on the iron bar of the balcony. But after looking in at the study window, he happened down and neither he nor the robin asked whether it was my purpose that the blackbird should have any of the crumbs! But there were the crumbs and they were both hungry, so they came and fed together. So, if any of you find Jesus Christ for yourselves and you know some poor soul who needs Him, do not begin asking whether it is God's purpose or decree that he, also, should find the Savior—go and invite him to come to Jesus and then both of you come to the Savior together—and then, just as the robin and blackbird exactly fulfilled my purpose in throwing out the crumbs, so, when you and your friend come to Christ, you will rejoice to find that you have, both of you, fulfilled the eternal purpose of the Divine Decree of the great heart of God! It is not your business to look into the book of God's secret purposes, but to look to Christ, or, as our text puts it, to, "behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world."

Ah, but this beholding of the Lamb of God is a thing to which men cannot readily be brought! I know many whose consciences are truly awakened and who see themselves as sinners in the sight of God, but instead of beholding the Lamb of God, they are continually beholding themselves! I do

not think that they have any confidence in their own righteousness, but they are afraid that they do not feel their guilt as much as they ought. They think that they are not yet sufficiently awakened, sufficiently humbled, sufficiently penitent and so on, and thus they fix their eyes upon themselves in the hope of getting peace with God! Suppose that yesterday or the day before, you had felt very cold and, therefore, you had gone outside your house and fixed your gaze upon the ice and the snow—do you think that sight would have warmed you? Now you know you would have been getting colder all the time! Suppose you are very poor and you studiously fix your mind's eye upon your empty pocket—do you think that will enrich you? Or imagine that you have had an accident and that one of your bones is broken—if you think very seriously of that broken bone, do you think that your consideration will mend it? Yet some sinners seem to imagine that salvation can come to them through their consideration of their lost and ruined condition! My dear unconverted Hearers, you are lost whether you know it or not! Take that fact for granted. If you would be saved, look not at yourselves, but “behold the Lamb of God.” He has been sent by His Father to be the Savior of sinners and it is by trust in Him that peace and pardon will come to you! I pray you not to suppose, for a ist because you have a tender heart, but come to Christ to get a tender heart! Do not come to Him because you are fit to come, but because you need to be

made fit! And remember that—

“All the fitness He requires

Is to feel your need of Him.

This He gives you

‘Tis the Spirit’s rising beam!”

Give up looking at yourself and “behold the Lamb of God.”

Let me also, dear Friend, warn you against the notion that your prayers can save you apart from beholding Christ. I believe that it is both the duty and the privilege of every living soul to pray—but that the first command to a sinner is to pray, I deny! There first command is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” And when you have done that, you will soon get to praying. I think it is stated in McCheyne’s life, that after an earnest sermon, he found a man under deep concern of soul. And after saying a word or two to him, he said, “I cannot stay longer with you, myself, but there is one of my elders who will pray with you.” The elder did so and he prayed in so fervent a fashion that it was remarked that he seemed to be like Jacob wrestling with the Angel until he prevailed. The man afterwards came to see Mr. McCheyne and said to him, “I am very thankful that I was at your Church that night. I feel very happy and I believe I am saved.” “Well,” said McCheyne, “what makes you feel so happy?” “Oh,” he said, “I have great faith in that good man’s prayers.” McCheyne at once said, “My Friend, I am afraid that good man’s prayers will ruin you! If that is where you are putting your confidence, you are utterly mistaken.” He was quite right. And your own prayers will be just such an obstacle in your way if you trust to them instead of trusting to Christ! “I know I pray,” says one, “and I am very earnest in prayer.” Well, I am glad of that as far as it goes, but if you have not something better to trust to than your own prayers, your prayers will ruin you—for the look of faith is not to be given to prayer, but to Christ! Our text says, “Behold the Lamb of God.” I have told you what that means—look by faith to the Sacrifice that Christ made for sinners on the Cross at Calvary—but if you look to anything else for salvation, you will not find it! Even your prayers, apart from faith in Christ, will not save you from everlasting destruction! O Sinner, get away from everything else and come to Christ—

“None but Jesus, none but Jesus,

Can do helpless sinners good!”

This great Truth of God, that believing is the Divinely-appointed means of salvation, may be illustrated by the old story of the children of Israel and the serpent of brass. [Other Sermons by Mr. Spurgeon upon this subject, are as follows—#153, Volume 3—THE MYSTERIES OF THE BRONZE SERPENT; #285, Volume 5—MAN’S RUIN AND GOD’S REMEDY and #1500, Volume 25—NUMBER 1500—OR, LIFTING UP THE BRONZE SERPENT—Read/download all these sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] You have heard it scores of times, yet

I beg you to listen to it once more! When the people were bitten by the fiery serpents in the wilderness, they were commanded to look at the serpent of brass that was lifted upon a pole—and whoever looked, lived. They had nothing to do but look! Moses lifted up the serpent and pointed to it and cried, “Look! Look! Look! And be healed.” Possibly there were some who said they were bitten too badly to look. Well, if they could not or did not look, they would die. They might think it was a proof of their humility to say, “We are too sick to be cured,” but if they did so, they would die whether they were humble or not! O my Hearer, do not be lost through a mock humility which is really abominable pride! You are not too great a sinner to be saved! I will venture to say that you will dishonor Christ if you ever think such a thing! So let not that sinful thought destroy you!

There may have been others who said, “We shall not look to the bronze serpent for we have only got a mere scratch—it will soon be gone.” But you know a poison scratch means death and if your sin were only a scratch (it is much more than that) it would mean eternal damnation for you! So look to Jesus, I implore you, just as you are! Look now! Look and live!

Perhaps there was one who said, “My father had a famous recipe for serpent bites. It was given to him by a celebrated doctor in Egypt, so we will mix up the proper ingredients and so get cured.” Well, if any who were bitten were to act and speak like that, they would all die—the deadly venom would certainly destroy them, whatever ointments they might use! A look at the bronze serpent gave life, but the refusal to look brought death.

There may have been some fine gentlemen there who had imbibed skeptical notions during their life in Egypt. They were so clever that they thought they knew a great deal more than the Lord’s servant to whom God had specially revealed the only effectual remedy, so they turned on their heels and said, “Such a remedy as this is utterly ridiculous! It is not according to the laws of physics that the mere looking at a piece of brass can heal people of the bites of snakes!” So they perished. Notwithstanding all their learning and wit, notwithstanding their jeers at the Divinely-appointed remedy, they perished. And nobody in the whole camp was healed except those who were simple enough and wise enough to take God at His word. Then, though they were terribly bitten, though their blood was set on fire by the poison and though some of them were in a truly desperate state—when they just looked at the bronze serpent—in a moment their blood again flowed healthily through their veins and their strength returned to them in all its former vigor! And, dear Friends, there shall be no soul saved in the whole world except by looking to the crucified Christ of Calvary! All trust in christening, (or even in Baptism), in confirmation, in sacraments, in ceremonies, in priests, popes and relics—are all lies—but as long as God’s Word remains true, he who looks by faith to Christ, alone, must and shall be eternally saved! Oh, how can I utter this Truth of God so as to make it plainer, or how shall I plead with you so as to bring you all to trust in Christ? I cannot do this, but I pray the Holy Spirit to do it, for He can—and then you will believe in Jesus and so receive everlasting life!

III. I must not detain you longer, as our time has fled. Otherwise I was to have answered a third question, WHY SHOULD WE THUS LOOK?

The answer would have been that God has appointed this as the only way of salvation, that those who obey the command of the text will obtain immediate salvation and that, being saved, they shall have joy and peace in believing! But you who neglect or refuse to “behold the Lamb of God” must, without doubt, everlastingly perish! Of His infinite mercy, may God graciously grant that none whom I am now addressing may refuse to believe in Jesus, but may everyone look to Him and live—live now, and live forever!