

Behold the Lamb of God! (John 19:14-16, 1:29)

Please turn to the gospel according to John's, chapter 1. As you turn there, I want to turn the calendar back to this month 159 years ago. It was October, 1857 in London. It was then the largest indoor church service in history and Charles Spurgeon preached to over 23,000. To put that in perspective, the new Sacramento Kings arena seats thousands less, but the gospel was heard by all with no microphones or amplification. Days earlier Spurgeon wanted to test the acoustics in the building. He read our text, what John the Baptist said in John 1:29 on the day John saw Jesus coming to him, he said '*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*' There was a man working back in the building that day, and as he heard those words, it was if a herald from heaven was calling him to behold the Lamb of God, to believe in Jesus for forgiveness of sins. Days later this man came to Spurgeon to tell him those words God used to draw him to behold Jesus in faith as the Lamb of God who took away his sin. May God help me herald this truth today.

'Behold, the Lamb of God,' v. 29 says, 'who takes away the sin of the world! ...³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. So behold the Lamb includes faith and following Christ. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ).

Nathanael in v. 49 says to Jesus: '*Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*' He beholds the Lamb of God as the Son of God and as the King of Israel. In Isaiah the Lord as King of Israel says '*look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth*' (44:6, 45:22). John wants us to look, to behold and be saved, but not by the type of King many were looking for, *behold the Lamb*. As Messiah-King He conquers, but not as a leader of a revolution, as a lamb. In the context, many looked for a military Messiah to come and take away the sinful Romans. But John the Baptist called them to behold Christ as a meek Lamb who comes to take away the sin of the world.

[[who would have thought that a lamb could rescue the souls of men?¹](#)]

A lamb is a little sheep, it's a weak, it's fuzzy and cuddly, not very majestic or impressive-looking. A guy's lamb wasn't good for much in Israel except to be slain for sacrifice. But this is God's Lamb of infinite precious blood. What does Philip say in v. 45 about the Lamb of God? He says to Nathanael ⁴⁵... '*We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote...*' When did Moses write about God's Lamb? Moses wrote Gen 22 where Isaac asks his dad '*behold the fire and the wood...where is the lamb?*'

Abraham's reply: '*God will provide for himself the lamb*' (22:8). But God didn't provide the lamb that day. God instead provided a ram caught in the thicket, a ram is an adult grown horned male sheep, a lamb is a baby sheep or less than a year old. That was a ram from God, but not *the Lamb of God*. Listen to the text after Abraham passed the test of faith: '*Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram...Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up...instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide" [future tense]; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."*' (v. 13-14). Israel to the day Moses wrote that was still looking forward to when God would provide His lamb. Where is the lamb? Not in Gen 22 but God will provide.

The son of Abraham asked '*where is the lamb?*' John the Baptist gives the answer, '*behold the Lamb!*' The first verse in the NT introduces Jesus as '*the son of Abraham*' in Mt 1, in Jn 1 He's first verbally introduced as *the Lamb of God*. There's something else Moses wrote that John probably has in mind in the time of the Exodus: God called for lambs to be slain for the Passover in Egypt. Moses wrote how those covered by the blood were spared death.

Later in the Law of Moses lambs became regular offerings for Israel's sins, and when Jews heard John say 'the lamb,' those were common connotations. But lambs *of men* couldn't take away sin, they all pointed to the *Lamb of God* who takes away the sin of the world for all who behold Him in faith. The prophets also spoke of the Lamb like v. 45 says, most notably Isa 53, the suffering servant Messiah would be slain but also would reign as King. In 1:29 '*behold the lamb of God,*' in v. 49 Nathanael beholds Jesus as King.

[Rev 17:14 says '*the Lamb will conquer...for He is King of kings*']

With all that in mind turn to Jn 19 and keep in mind that context in our text. Remember daily the Jews sacrificed lambs, and annually a Passover Lamb feast celebrated their Exodus deliverance from slavery under Egypt's king. An ancient Jewish tradition looked for Messiah-King to come at Passover. Look at John 19:14: *Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"*¹⁵ *They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."*¹⁶ *So he delivered him over to them to be crucified ...*

Notice the time marker at the start of v. 14: *the day of the Preparation of the Passover*. As Passover lambs are being killed, God's Lamb will be killed. Remember the Jewish tradition Messiah-King would come on Passover?

Jn 19:14 doesn't want you to miss what Israel's most religious missed on Passover: Messiah-King came that Passover but was rejected by the priests. 'Passover is the great celebration of Israel's deliverance from slavery by God's almighty power; then it was that he showed himself as King, and they became his people. In this celebration the Jews gathered before Pilate are about to play a decisive part in the fulfillment of the Passover, a second Exodus, wherein God would achieve an emancipation for all nations, not for Israel alone...The crucial hour of destiny for Jew and Gentile has arrived.'²

v. 14 adds it was *the sixth hour*. This is the very hour rabbis said Passover lambs were to be slain, the sixth hour is when God's Lamb goes to be slain. There's some discussion whether John is using Jewish or Roman reckoning of time, I take the view Jesus is on the cross around noon to mid-afternoon; so the very time when lambs were killed at Passover was when the Lamb of God was killed. I also lean to the view that the Northern and Southern Jews celebrated Passover over the course of 2 days³ ('between the evenings' was the OT phrase that allowed some flexibility). So the Galilean disciples ate their Passover on Thursday night, but for the local religious leaders Pilate is talking to in Jn 18-19, they would eat the Passover Friday night. 18:28 *Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.*

This shows their religious hypocrisy, not wanting to enter a Gentile home to be defiled before worship but they're good murdering a Jew before worship. But the wickedness of these chief priests can't overshadow the worthiness of the Lamb who was slain, not just for Israel's sin, but for the sin of the world, for all who believe. So turn back to Jn 1 and I want you to see this theme of Passover dominates and drives the whole book of John and the whole Bible in some sense. I don't want to just fly through the crucifixion narrative, John wants us to '*behold the Lamb of God,*' that means pause, stop, look, listen, give full attention and affection to, consider, contemplate the Lamb of God.

Jn 1:1 begins in the beginning, but in John's writing this theme really starts before creation, there was a covenant of redemption, or plan of salvation for '*the Lamb [to be] slain from the foundation of the world*' (Rev 13:8 NKJV). Or John writes that those God chose in eternity past had their names '*written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb*' (ESV of Rev 13:8). The plan of God's Lamb to be slain and those He would redeem written in the Lamb's book of life, that started before the beginning of Jn 1:1

Jesus created all things (Jn 1:1-3), including lambs to give us this analogy. Israel's Passover lambs were to dwell among each family in the days before they would be killed so they would behold the lamb to be slain, Jn 1:14 says Jesus dwelt among us and we beheld His glory. God's Lamb has a glory to behold, v. 29 *'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'* (lambs of men aren't glorious, but God's Lamb as Savior is glorious to see).

In Jn 2:13 notice the time marker John gives as Jesus begins His ministry:
¹³ *The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.* ¹⁴ *In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.* ¹⁵ *And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.* There was a corrupt business of selling lambs for Passover pilgrims, the Lamb of God drives all of them out, so He's the only Lamb in the place. Part of Passover Law was a cleansing of the house, that's exactly the term Jesus uses in v. 16 to describe the house He just cleansed of the leaven of the false religionists before Passover. ²³ *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.*

Jesus begins His public ministry on a Passover week and His final week of public ministry would also be a Passover week. The only other detail given about Jesus before His adult ministry was going to Passover at 12 years old. It was then that Jesus called that place *'my Father's house.'* He spent 3 days after Passover talking with the rabbis asking them questions and amazing them at His understanding and answers that I suspect revolved around the Passover and the Messiah. I'd love to have been a fly on the temple wall to hear that conversation, and I wonder if some of the same teachers were still around 28 years later in Jn 2 when Jesus again speaks of *'my Father's house'*

Was Nicodemus one of them? In Jn 3:2 we read *'This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."* In v. 10 Jesus will call Nicodemus *'the teacher of Israel,'* with a reputation like that maybe he was one of Israel's teachers that Passover when Jesus was 12? Jn 3:16 is clear, though, God's Lamb is for the world, not just for Israel: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* In the first Passover in Egypt, whoever didn't believe and apply the blood of the Lamb to their house saw their son perish, but God gave His Son Jesus so all who believe won't perish

That phrase '*only son*' is the NT equivalent of the phrase in Gen 22 used for Abraham's only (begotten beloved) son Isaac that he was willing to give but didn't have to, believing God would provide the Lamb. God the Father did give His Son to perish, He provided the Lamb for us to behold by believing. John the Baptist says in v. 28 he's not the Messiah but was sent before Him. The Jewish tradition to this day is Elijah will come before, on a Passover, to show Israel Messiah, there may be a cup at the table for him, a chair, a door left open. Jesus said of John the Baptist, '*he is the Elijah who was to come... Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him*' (Mt 11:14, 17:12). John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah to show the Messiah who fulfills all the Passover symbolism, to point them to behold the Lamb. And during Passover weeks Jesus shows Himself to be the Messianic Lamb.

In the next chapter, Jn 4:45, we read this, Jn 4:45 says when Jesus '*came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast* [that's Passover].' In Jn 6 again Jesus reveals Himself on another Passover week, maybe a year later. Jn 6:4 says this: *Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.* It's the days before Passover when He heals people and miraculously feeds the 5,000+ multiplying loaves of bread, then Jesus teaches in v. 35: '*I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger.*' The unleavened bread they had for the Passover feast that week was another picture of Christ who is without leaven, without sin, He's the fulfillment of the Passover symbols.

Now go to the end of chapter 11 and at the close of Christ's ministry it's no coincidence John records it was the week before a third and final Passover. Jn 11:55 *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover...* **12:1:** *Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany...*¹² *The next day* [Sunday] *the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.*¹³ *So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"*¹⁴ *And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,*¹⁵ *"Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king..."*

This is the high point of John's revelation of who Jesus is: *behold your king!* Jn 1 starts with *behold the lamb* and in Jn 1 He's first called '*king of Israel.*' Days later Pilate unwittingly says to the Jews the very same words from OT prophecy about Christ: '*behold your King!*' Pilate didn't believe the Jewish scriptures or have any desire to worship a Jewish King (he calls him '*your*'

not *'our King'*), but like the little children on Palm Sunday hailing the king, joining the chants to Son of David, they said more than they knew. Out of the mouths of babes and even bad men like Pilate we hear Jesus is the King. But not a military monarch, He comes to take away sin, and He starts again by taking away sin in the temple, a Passover house-cleaning for God's house

The other gospel writers tell us Jesus again drove out the corrupt businesses and all the lambs and everything else and He took over the temple that week as the only Lamb of God. And on that week He prophesied the temple itself would be taken away, the only place to sacrifice lambs for sin is taken away by the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world by His sacrifice. In days before Passover, history tells us the road from Bethany to Jerusalem temple could have been filled with thousands of lambs being brought, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims might travel this way the days before Passover. This day they behold the Lamb of God, and behold their King who conquers sin. Jewish leaders in the temple in days right before Passover would examine lambs in the temple to see if there was any spot or blemish to disqualify for sacrifice. As Jesus stood as God's Lamb in the temple for 3 days that week they examine Him and can find no fault (Mt 21-23). Peter said Jesus is the *'lamb unblemished and spotless,'* so His blood is precious, perfect to redeem

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we; Spotless Lamb of God was He:

Full atonement!-- can it be? Hallelujah! what a Savior!⁴

On Thursday, Lk 22 tells us: *'the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us..."* That involved taking and slaying the lamb in the temple, shedding its blood, preparing the elements of the feast, cups, etc. As they gathered in the upper room for the Passover, they beheld their King stoop to wash their feet, they beheld God's Lamb hold a cup and say *this is my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins...* That's how the Lamb of God takes away sins. That night He gave the upper room discourse of Jn 13-18 and instituted the Lord's Table, or we could also call it the King's Table or the King's Supper. We're to do it until He comes to eat again with us the Supper of the Lamb.

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away, Slain for us, and we remember

The promise made that all who come in faith Find forgiveness at the cross.

So we share in this bread of life, And we drink of His sacrifice

As a sign of our bonds of peace Around the table of the King.⁵

So back to Jn 19, that's all backdrop to Jn 19:14 where on the last day of Passover week, at the culmination of it, Pilate says *'behold your King!'*

It was Preparation day of Passover, v. 14 says, at the very hour lambs were being prepared for slaughter, in the temple, Jesus was prepared as God's Passover Lamb. The end of v. 16 says in the NKJV: *'they took Jesus and led Him away.'* Isa 53 says of Messiah *'He was led as a lamb to the slaughter...'* If you look at Jn 19:1, it says *'Pilate took Jesus and flogged/scourged him.'* Pilate little knew all he was saying and doing was fulfilling prophecy like Isa 53:5 that says of God's Lamb *'by his scourging we are healed'* (NASB). Jesus in v. 2 is *'oppressed, and he was afflicted...like a lamb'* (Isa 53, v. 7). In Jn 19:3 soldiers do violence to the lamb who *'did no violence'* (Isa 53:9). They sinfully bruise His face and wound His head, but He's *'bruised for our sin'* (Isa 53:5 NKJV) and actually *'with his wounds we are healed'* (v. 5 ESV). In Jn 19:5 Pilate says, I think sarcastically despising him, *'behold the man'* 'look at this bloody beat up wimp, he's no king.' Isa 53 says *'he had no form or majesty that we should look at...He was despised and rejected by men...'*

If we could have seen His face with the crown of thorns, the blood gushing down the forehead like it does with a head wound, we would have all hid our faces and had to look away, that's exactly what Isa 53:3 says, and Isaiah adds this *'He was wounded for our transgressions'* (v. 5 NKJV). In Jn 19:9 Jesus refuses to answer one about to kill him, also fulfilling that same prophecy: *'he opened not his mouth...like a lamb'* (v. 7). People spoke deceitfully of Jesus, but Isaiah says of the Lamb *'there was no deceit in his mouth'* (53:9). In Jn 19:16 Jesus is taken to be crucified, an execution where hands and feet were pierced. Isa 53:5 says *'He was pierced through for our sin'* (NAS). Even Pilate's words *'behold your king'* fulfill prophecy, Zech 9:9.

[John wants us to behold our king Jesus who's really in charge here]

This Lamb is no helpless victim, this is heaven's Victor! This is no tragedy for the Lord, this is the triumph of the Lamb! The Lamb of God is not being conquered by sin or Satan in Jn 19, He's conquering sin and Satan! Col 2:15 says Jesus *'put them to open shame'* or *'made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross'* (NIV). Rev 12:11 says believers *conquer [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb*. In Jn 19:16 these unbelievers thought they led Jesus away in defeat, but Paul says for believers *'God...always leads us in triumph in Christ'* (2 Cor 2:14 NKJV). Is this a practical doctrine when you feel defeated? Absolutely! There is always triumph in Christ, there's always victory in Jesus when you behold your King and trust Him as the sovereign One who always fulfills all His promises, even in the darkest time

[God's] gift of love, they crucified They laughed and scorned Him as He died
The humble King, they named a fraud And sacrificed the Lamb of God
Oh, Lamb of God, sweet Lamb of God I love the holy Lamb of God⁶

How did the NT writers apply this? Paul in 1 Corinthians *'None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory...Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed'* (2:8, 5:7). And Paul explained to that same church why beholding the glory of the Lamb, beholding our Lord of glory is so practical for us: *'beholding the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image...'* (2 Cor 3:18). As we're beholding, we're being transformed. We need to gaze at Jesus if we want to be changed by Jesus. Beholding is the key to becoming. If you're not reading through the Bible daily already, let me urge you to start today, tomorrow AM, behold the Lamb of God, see His glory (start in Jn 1).

Peter also talks about Christ as 'a lamb' (1 Peter 1:19), then he calls us to behold Christ as He went to the cross: *'Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps...He...did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...by whose stripes you were healed.'* (2:21-24). When suffering, insulted; behold the Lamb, His example and healing grace

Another practical way to behold the Lamb besides the gospels is to look up how the Lamb is described in the book of Revelation. The same John who wrote *'behold the lamb'* and *'behold your king'* in the gospel, John visually beheld those themes in the visions of Revelation. Use a concordance or an online Bible, or smart-phone Bible app and search for 'lamb' in Revelation. 1st is Rev 5:6 *'I looked, and behold...a Lamb as though it had been slain.'* He still bears those scars. A hymn says 'the Lamb upon His throne...behold his hands and side, Rich wounds yet visible above, in beauty glorified.'⁷ *Behold the Lamb* something that really works for those in despair or guilt?

When Satan tempts me to despair, And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see Him there, Who made an end of all my sin ...
Behold Him there the risen Lamb, My perfect spotless righteousness,
The great unchangeable I AM, The King of glory and of grace⁸

Behold your King of grace and behold the Lamb who was slain but is risen, and reigns. Look up from sin and self to behold Him there who takes away sin as we look to Him in faith and turn from sin. Behold the Lamb of God who makes an end to all sin, behold Him before the throne of God above. But unbelievers fear the wrath of the Lamb, 6:16. The hope? Behold in faith

say: 'without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me...O Lamb of God
...to rid my soul of [sin's] dark blot, to Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot
...Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind...Yea, all I need in Thee to find--O Lamb of God
receive...welcome, pardon, cleanse relieve, because Your promise I believe, O Lamb...'⁹

For believers how do we *behold the Lamb*? That's a command in the gospel and the same John also explained how our view of Jesus can increase, how we can see more of the Lamb. Jn 3:30 '*He must increase, I must decrease.*' I need to behold Christ more, think more of Him and less of me, and so do you. We need to make much of the Savior and make little of self. This starts as you go from here, will you focus on you or will you behold your King? If He must increase, we need increased time spent with Him and His Word. If I must decrease, I must discipline me to decrease focus on me, myself and I.

When Satan tempts, and doubts and fears assail, Look to the Lamb of God;
 You in His strength shall over all prevail, Look to the Lamb of God.
 Are you weary, does the way seem long? Look to the Lamb of God;
 His love will cheer and fill your heart with song, Look to the Lamb of God.
 Fear not when shadows on your pathway fall, Look to the Lamb of God;
 In joy or sorrow Christ is all in all, Look to the Lamb of God.¹⁰

Turn to Rev 7. What we sang earlier also helps apply beholding the Lamb:

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing pow'r?
 ...Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?
 ...Are you walking daily by the Savior's side?
 ...Do you rest each moment in the Crucified?
 ...Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin,
 ...There's a fountain flowing for the soul unclean,
 Oh, be washed in the blood of the Lamb!¹¹

Turn to Rev 7 and the next time we behold the Lamb in John's writing is an incredible scene that should give believers great hope. In Rev 7:9 John says '*I looked, and behold...*' and before the Lamb he beholds a vast multitude of every tribe, tongue, nation, and people group, all washed in the blood of the Lamb, v. 14 says. v. 16: *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.* ¹⁷ *For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*" Close in Rev 5:11 ... *I looked* [KJV 'beheld'], *and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,* ¹² *saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"* ¹³ *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"* ¹⁴ *And the four living creatures said, "Amen!"* [and all God's creatures said]

¹ Dawn Rodgers and Eric Wyse, "Wonderful Merciful Savior."

² George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36, p. 341.

³ John MacArthur, Leon Morris, James Boice, and others present arguments for this view.

⁴ Philip Bliss, "Hallelujah, What a Savior!"

⁵ Keith and Kristyn Getty and Stuart Townend, "Behold the Lamb (Communion Hymn)."

⁶ Twila Paris, "Lamb of God."

⁷ Matthew Bridges, "Crown Him with Many Crowns."

⁸ Charitie Bancroft, "Before the Throne of God Above."

⁹ Charlotte Elliot and William Bradbury, "Just As I Am."

¹⁰ H.G. Jackson, "Look to the Lamb of God."

¹¹ Elisha Hoffman, "Are You Washed in the Blood?"