Lamb of God

A Sermon by Adoniram Judson Gordon

(Transcribed by John Beauregard December, 1984)

I. The Sin Bearing Lamb. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29

"The Lamb of God" is an expression of marked definiteness. It is The Lamb long promised and prefigured. Abraham speaks as a prophet when he said to Isaac on the altar "My Son God will provide himself a Lamb," Isaiah prophesied in the Spirit when he wrote of the Messiah "He is led as a lamb to the slaughter."

Every priest was divinely foreshadowing the great offering for sin when he shed the blood of the firstling of the flock upon the altar. Now the reality has appeared: all the rays of prophetic light, all the gleams of ritual instruction have found a focus in Christ, and the last prophet of the old dispensation, John the Baptist, answers back to all who have gone before him saying: Rejoice thou holy prophets that your word has been fulfilled. Cease your sacrifices ye consecrated priests for "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." And having satisfied the saints of the old covenant he now introduces Christ for the saints of the new: for the next day he stands with two of his disciples pointing to Jesus he saith "Behold the Lamb of God". These disciples follow Jesus while John retires from sight and the morning star fades away in the light of the risen sun.

If now we ask the meaning of the words "taketh away the sins of the world." The commentators tell us that the word signifies to bear or to bear away: to carry or to carry off. Both ideas no doubt are wrapped up in the word.

Christ could never have been the bearer away of sin unless he had been the bearer of sin. Strange paradox yet true! Our Redeemer must be slain by our guilt before he could slay our guilt. He must be crushed by our sin in order that he should crush our sins. He must be the sin bearer in order that he should be the sin remover.

I had an advanced thinker say to me lately when I challenged him with the question whether he believed in salvation by the blood of Christ. "Yes" "I believe that Christ saves the world, by his blood pulsating in the veins of his living body, and not by the blood shed from the wounds of his dying body."

That means forgiveness without propitiation, justification without satisfaction - which being interpreted signifies settlement of indebtedness without payment of the debt. But I am not ready to believe that God falsifies his account in order to make me happy. He is the great Book-keeper of the universe - for I read of a "Book of Remembrance" being kept before Him now, and of the "books being opened" hereafter. I cannot conceive that He will balance his books by inbalancing the relations between his justice and his mercy, his righteousness and his grace. The law of God says "The soul that sinneth it shall die." It is because "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" and because he graciously and justly accepted His death instead of mine that I have the remission of sins. There is no other ground on which I can expect it.
Remembrance and Redemption are the debit and credit pages of God's ledger. On the one side is the record of your sins, on the other side the record of Christ's death. These two are so related that He can square His accounts with every repenting and believing soul, calling upon angels and archangels and all the host of heaven to audit his books and to write at the foot of the page "just and the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus." Not one of them can refuse.

"The justifier of him that believeth." What grace to the sinner is herein revealed. Sin gone away, the sinner brought nigh. Christ condemns sin in the flesh, and justifies the sinner who believes. Have you ever thought what a parable of redemption a public execution presents? Here is the criminal, and here are two men officiating on either side, the chaplain and the executioner. The one represents justice and the other represents law. If the chaplain is invited to be there, why not let him have his way and give mercy full sweep. Let the cords which bind the limbs of the culprit be cut, let the black cap be flung away and let the executioner pronounce the words "thy sins are forgiven thee go in peace." Why not? Because the Law says: "the penalty for murder is death. Unless the whole order and stability of society is to be impuned that penalty must be enforced. Therefore the gallows in the hand of the executioner must enforce the penalty of sin. But the gospel in the hand of the chaplain may pronounce the forgiveness of sins, if there be sincere repentence. The Law and grace act side by side, the one forgiving, the other condemning. No one thinks of ridiculing the presence of the executioner and the chaplain on the same scaffold as an absurdity.

But one of the most brilliant unitarians which New England has produced once denounced the doctrine of atonement, as we preach it, declaring that it puts "a gallows in the centre of the universe" instead of setting up a throne of grace there. Nay it found a gallows in the centre of the universe, which had been standing there since eternity - a gallows over which word is written "the soul that sinneth it shall die." And when the Redeemer and Substitute voluntarily took his place upon that gallows, two invisible forms were present there, the executioner, justice, and the Messiah, mercy. As justice drove the nails through

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respite for the terms of my good behavior. I am "justified from all things, from which I could not be justified by the Law. This is the gospel which is set before you as we sing "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."

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III. The enthroned Lamb "And lo, in the midst of the throne stood a lamb as it had been slain."

An eminent commentator says that finding the expression "my new name" in the book of Revelation he set himself to search whether there is any name applied to Christ in that book which is new and has not been employed before in the Bible. He found such a name - Arnion, the lamb, a Greek word for lamb which is nowhere else given to Christ but is used as his title some thirty times in the Apocalypse.

What is the meaning of this word as indicate by its use in this book? It is humiliation glorified. It is weakness enthroned. It is lowliness exalted.

On earth Christ is the Lamb of God crucified. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." In heaven he is the Lamb of God glorified - "A Lamb in the midst of the throne.

On earth he is the lamb in subjection and weakness. "He is led as a lamb to the slaughter". In heaven he is a lamb in authority. "The lamb in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto fountains of living waters."

On earth his blood is the symbol of our redemption "redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold but with the precious blood of Christ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." In heaven his blood is the banner of victory "They overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony." Victory - Everywhere victory to the Lamb.

On earth he knows only weakness and poverty and shame and cursing. In heaven ten times ten thousand and thousands of thousands cry "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.

Instead of "cursed is he that hangeth on a tree" they cry both in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea hear and say "Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne and unto the lamb forever."

But what is his relation now to us? He is our leader and feeder and sin bearer. "The lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them into fountains of living water." As the spotless lamb he is our righteousness. The suffering lamb, our sacrifice and the serving lamb our leader.
Do you not see how closely these connect with what Christ said on earth "I am the way the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me". "I am the door, by me if any man enter in he shall go in and out and find pasture." But why in and out, we ask in profound astonishment. If once we have entered in through Christ, shall we not remain in - sheltered, folded, guarded and fed? Why go out, when we are once in?

My brethren here is a lesson of great importance for us all. The apostle contemplating Jesus Christ upon the throne gives these two exhortations in the Hebrews. First, "Let us enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" and secondly, "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp". Inside the vail for communion, strength and fellowship with Christ. Outside the camp for service, suffering, and work for Christ. Never shall we fulfill the true aim and purpose of the hemisphere instead of spherical and therefore ill balanced and unsteady.

Now see what the enthroned Lamb does for us. "The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them unto living fountains of water." He brings us into the presence of the Father where we are refreshed and nourished and shepherded by communion. He only can give us access there. "I am the way: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." He who is elsewhere constantly represented in Scripture as seated on his Father's throne is twice and twice only seen as standing up. Once when the dying Stephen was about to fall asleep in death. With a radiant face he looked up and said "I see Jesus standing on the right hand of God" as though the Lord had risen from his seat to welcome this proto-martyr into glory and to present him to the Father as the first-fruits of his bleeding toil. And yet once again in this book of Revelation - "And lo in the midst of the throne stood a Lamb as it had been slain"! A vision which has remained before the eyes of the church ever since the day that John in Patmos saw a door opened in the heaven." As though to show us Jesus risen up to introduce us to the Father saying, "Come ye beloved - the wounds upon my body answer every charge concerning thy sins: the righteousness of my person covers every defect in thy character. Come and I will lead thee into the pure water of the river of life that flows from the throne of God - that you may drink and I will give thee to eat of the tree of life that is in the midst of the Paradise of God. Not a future or far off experience am I talking about but a present reality - the soul going up to meet Christ and by his guidance entering within the vail to be fed and nourished and strengthened. Blessed is the christian who knows the secret of entering in to God, before presuming to go forth to bless and save men. Secure your anchor within the vail which the forerunner has for us entered before you undertake for souls.

Wouldest thou go forth to bless
Be sure of thine own ground:
Fix well thy center first
Then draw thy circle round. (Wellington's hand grasp)
And he who leads us also leads out. For I read of the blood washed through that "they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." Here is the highest and most perfect abiding. It is easy for us to choose our service, and select our field, and fix upon our work and then pray our Lord to follow us with his blessing. It is a far different matter for us to yield everything to the guidance of the Lord, that he may lead us where ever he will. Do you remember how Christ said the Peter "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself and walkest whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old another shalt gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."

That is the difference between the self-willed and unconsecrated christian and the christian who is out and out for God.

Ask these blood washed ones why they follow the Lord so faithfully. "Thou hast redeemed us from among men" - is thy answer.