

Date: March 29, 2024

Title: Good Friday

Speaker: Jake Williams, Jonathan Thiede, Bryce Vaught

Speaker 1 - Jake Williams

John 1:29 says this. "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" John the Baptist saw Jesus walking toward him and he said, "Look!" The word "look" in our modern English is the Greek word "idou" which is often translated as behold. Behold means to gaze, to witness, to think, to grasp.

When John the Baptist says, "Behold this is the lamb of God." He means, I see it. I get it. What was going through John's head when he said, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?" It must have been something like this. Most of what John knew about lambs would have come from the Passover centuries before John saw Jesus walking toward him.

The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. Moses went to Pharaoh and said let my people go. And Pharaoh wouldn't. God sent nine plagues on Egypt because of their injustice, oppression, and rebellion against God. Finally, God said I'm going to send a final plague, and when this plague happens, they will let you go. I'm going to send my angel of death, and he will slay the firstborn in every home. In that society, everyone's hopes were tied up in family and especially the firstborn son. Subsequently, this 10th and final plague would have dashed the hopes of every family. It was a devastating judgment. So, God said because of Egypt's injustice and rebellion, and since they're not letting you go, I will judge them. I will send my angel of death.

But then God says to the Israelites, don't forget. Sin is a debt, and you are sinners too. So, when the angel of death comes, the only way to save your firstborn, is to kill a lamb and sprinkle the blood on your door post. Then the angel of death will pass over you, and you will not be slain for your sins. That was the start of Passover and year after year after year, a lamb was slain to memorialize Passover, the night the Israelites did not pay for their sin.

This concept may not make sense to some. You may say. Really? You kill a sweet, little cute lamb and that atones for your sins. How can that be? Besides the story of Passover and the struggle with believing that's all it takes to atone for sin, John the Baptist would have known about mysterious figures from the Old Testament. These figures in the Old Testament were predicted to come, and no one knew who they were. There was the Messianic King from the early part of Isaiah. And people thought, oh yeah, that's the guy we want. Then there was the Prophet figure from Deuteronomy 18.

Then there was the suffering servant figure. This person was predicted in the latter chapters of Isaiah, and no one could quite put a finger on who this person was. Surely it couldn't be the powerful messianic king from the early part of Isaiah. Isaiah 53 tells us about this servant figure. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted. Yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to slaughter.

Suddenly, the Holy Spirit reveals to John the Baptist who Jesus is and all these threads, themes, and figures. They come together and he says, I understand. Behold. It wasn't just the repeated sacrifice of little lambs that atone for sin, but it's the perfect ultimate lamb. The lamb of God. And here He is, God's own son. The reason the Israelites first born didn't die on the night of the Passover is because God is offering up his firstborn.

If you had lived back then and had stopped an Israelite in the desert of Sinai and asked them, who are you? What are you doing here? They would have said I was a slave and an alien in a foreign land under the penalty of death. But I took shelter under the blood of the Lamb. Morally, ethically, racially, there was nothing I could do to save myself. But I was saved. And this is exactly what Christians say. Everything in history, the history of the world, and everything in biblical history all climaxed the day Jesus became the LAMB of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is strength and weakness. This is the king who is a lamb. How could this be? If the messianic king came the first time in strength to destroy evil, since evil is in your heart and in my heart, we would be destroyed. Instead of coming in strength, he comes in weakness. He comes in strong weakness, in bold humility. He comes as the ultimate sacrificial lamb that ends the sacrificial system and pays the penalty that we deserve. So that someday, when he comes back to end evil, he won't end those who have faith in him, but will give them eternal life. And suddenly, John the Baptist understands. He sees the strong messianic king who is the meek lamb of God and the suffering servant.

Some years ago in the publication National Geographic, after a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, some forest rangers began to trek up the mountain to survey the damage. One ranger found a bird of which nothing was left but a carbonized, petrified shell covered in ashes, huddled at the base of a tree. Somewhat sickened by this unnerving sight, the ranger knocked the bird over with a stick and three tiny chicks scampered from under their dead mother's wings. When the fire had arrived, the mother had remained steadfast.

Instead of running on the cross, Jesus gathers his children under his wings as the ultimate sacrificial lamb. He is consumed when Jesus, the ultimate lamb, cried out on the cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" Which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The father paid the price in his silence.

Behold the perfect lamb. John 19:33 pointed out Jesus's bones were not broken. Why? Because it had to be a lamb without spot or blemish. Matthew 27 pointed out that Jesus died just a twilight. Why? Because the lamb was to be slain at twilight. The perfect sacrificial lamb didn't just pay the price for our sins and his earthly suffering.

It wasn't just the repeated lashes, the bloody crown of thorns, the thirst, the nails driven through his body, suffocation on the cross, and the unimaginable physical pain. The perfect lamb experienced cosmic pain that day when the father turned away. Jesus took our sin upon himself. The father can turn to us in love because He turned away from Jesus on the cross. Either sin is with you lying on your shoulders or just lying on Christ the LAMB of God. If it is lying on your back, you're lost. If it is resting on Christ, you are free and you will be saved.

Speaker 2 - Jonathan Theide

Behold the lion. A sweltering summer day in sub-Saharan Africa. A great day for sightseeing. You're taking picture after picture because you don't want to forget the memories you've made on this once in a lifetime trip. Suddenly, you realize that while away from the group, the tour guide had driven off without you. Panic starts to set in as you realize the barrier between you and nature has been taken away. Nothing now separates you from this upfront experience with the animal kingdom.

Your heart begins to race as you question whether human beings sit at the top of the food chain. Your foot betrays you as a twig beneath your foot refuses to endure your weight. I sure hope no one heard that you hear yourself say. All of a sudden, every footstep, every action, every inch seems so loud to you as you tiptoe through this murderous wasteland.

From afar, you hear a sound that turns this distasteful dream into a full-on nightmare. Behold the roar of the lion. A full grown male African lion. Do you scream? You don't dare. Do you run? It wouldn't really make a difference. All you can do is hope. Hope that this beast doesn't sense your presence out of fear.

You begin to curse this lion when suddenly you hear it again. The roar of the lion. Except this time, it's even louder. It's even closer. Suddenly you see movement as your nightmare comes to its climax. The king of the jungle emerges with yet another roar. You wonder how humans could ever have been so proud, so arrogant, to even consider the possibility that a beast like this could be tamed. As your eyes meet its four great legs, its piercing teeth, and its deadly claws, you think back on all the cartoons you watched as a kid that pictured lions as gentle, friendly creatures. As you take what could be your final breath, you can only behold. Behold the lion.

It's a wonder, isn't it? How baffling is it that we've become so familiar, so comfortable with the concept of a lion? What do you think about when you think about lions? You think about the Lion King. Kids toys, cartoons, and creatures to see at the zoo. When truth be told, there is no encounter with an animal more terrifying, more dreadful, and more inspiring than that of one with a lion. And for that reason, it's interesting that this animal is used as a comparison to God throughout Scripture.

And so today, I want to point out two places the Bible talks about God as a lion and two very different reactions this description gets. The first place is in the Old Testament in Amos 3:8. In the book, Amos has a difficult message that the God who once created Israel, Israel's God, is now Israel's enemy. Very simply, the verse says, "The lion has roared - who will not fear?"

The lion has roared - who will not fear? His message is pretty clear that in light of God's lion-like ferociousness, the only logical reaction is fear. This lines up with our experience with lions, whether at the zoo or in the wild. Fear seems about right, and fear seems about right for a few reasons. The first is that like a lion, God is a force to be reckoned with. He is not cartoonish. He is not like the mayor from the movie *Zootopia* who struts around with a politician's smile. No, God is sovereign overall. God is powerful and he knows it. There's not a power that can rise above him. He snaps nations like toothpicks, and he demolishes armies as if they were anthills.

The second reason is that God is the king of the jungle. God has created the world, and as king, God has the right to judge, even if that means death. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. And we feel that, don't we? Deep down, we feel the sense of a lion's roar any time that we sin. Any time that we do something wrong, the guilt inside of us reverberates inside of our chests. We feel that some sort of judgment is coming, and we don't like to be judged because deep down, we fear how we will measure up. And when you're a kid and you're in trouble with mom and dad, remember that lightheaded feeling that anticipates punishment? The feeling of being caught in the act. This is, in a sense, what it means to be human. And because of the fear, we stay far away from God, don't we?

C.S. Lewis once wrote about two fictional characters named Ransom and Oyarsa. And this guy, Ransome, finds himself on Oyarsa's Planet and Oyarsa is king of the whole planet. And as soon as he lands, he finds something within but does not want to face the king. And when he finally meets the king, Oyarsa says to him, you began to be afraid of me before you set foot in my world, and you've spent all your time since then running from me. And we are the same with God.

Maybe this is your first time at church in a while, and you're thinking to yourself, yes, this is true of me. In light of what I know about God, I feel unworthy to come before Him. And so, as a result, I don't want anything to do with him. And in your quietest, most honest moments, you might even confess yourself that you hate God.

This is where the story gets good because it takes us to the second place that the Bible talks about God as a lion. In our verse, in Revelation 5:5, we see it being used to describe Jesus as he takes his rightful place on the throne. Revelation 5:5 says, "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'"

This message is different, isn't it? It continues this motif, the symbolism that God is a powerful lion. But notice it commands us to behave in the exact opposite way. It carries the exact opposite emotion. At the beginning of the Bible, the appropriate reaction to God was fear. But it seems now in Jesus, the lion metaphor is used to comfort God's people. Here at the end of the Bible, John says, behold the lion. But this time, instead of fearing him, we were to glory in him. We're to praise him. We're to worship him. We are to take comfort in him.

Now, how do we make sense of this in light of everything we've just talked about? Why would the imagery of God as a lion be comforting? It's the very reason we're gathered here this Good Friday. At the cross, God takes what is true of you and what is true of him, and He blends it perfectly in his perfect son at the cross. God affirms your greatest fear. It truly is a worst-case scenario. God says, yes, you are a sinner. Yes, you have fallen short. Yes, you do deserve death. He says, yes, you are broken. You're messed up. You're in need of a savior. But he takes that worst-case scenario, and he combines it with his best-case scenario. Because don't you know, at the cross, God shows his true colors.

We wonder our whole lives, what is God like? If there is a God, what is he like? We find it on Good Friday because at the cross he tenderly reaches down to us and he says, though you have a great problem, I offer a great solution. Though you are a great sinner, I am a great

savior. Though you are under judgment, I will transfer your judgment and punish another. And what does he do? He shows you the love of God.

Romans 5:8 says this, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This verse tells us that at the cross, Jesus displays his perfect love. And as he approaches the cross, that sin has nailed you to, the sin of the cross that you deserve, He methodically, slowly climbs up and takes the nails out of your left hand, out of your right hand. He unwedges the nail from your foot, and he does that provocative thing in the history of humankind. The perfect Son of God uses those three nails to nail himself to the cross.

And we look up at him and we think, this doesn't make sense, and we plead with him. But no matter how many times you plead with him, no matter how many times you say, Jesus, come down from the cross, you don't deserve this. He simply looks down at you, and he quotes Romans 5:8 in his own words, and he says, I love you. I have always loved you. I will always love you.

And so, this is why, this is why the Saints at the end of time in Revelations 5:5 can approach the lion with boldness. We can approach the lion not in fear, but because of the love that the lion has shown to us. John writes these words in order for believers in Jesus to take comfort, take heart in his death. Jesus, the lion has triumphed. He has been victorious. He has overcome sin and death so that the barrier could be dropped, so that you could draw near to God. And now, the roar that once said, run from me, is the same roar that says, come to me.

The roar of the lion is still felt, but instead of judgment, it has been replaced by comfort. And here is why we are comforted. Because the sinless savior died, my sinful soul is counted free. For God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me. This is the Gospel. Jesus, the lion has overcome on your behalf. And now He invites you to draw near. He says, stop running. Draw near to me as I have drawn near to you. Behold, the lion seated on his throne. Triumphantly, he shares his victory with you. He's strong enough to kill, but he has chosen to save. Behold the lion and take comfort in his roar.

Speaker 3 - Bryce Vaught

If we could get a glimpse into the garden of testimony the night before Jesus's crucifixion, we find a man who, at least on initial appearances, looks like someone who's not quite ready to be the sacrificial lamb. Certainly doesn't have the posture of a king. You find man who is face down on the ground, emotional, inconsolable, dreading what's about to take place. It says he's face down on the ground, crying out with loud shouts and tears and sweating drops of blood in anticipating the events to come.

And we might begin to wonder, if he is this upset and anxious, just anticipating what's about to happen, how is he ever going to be able to stand and make it through the events itself? And yet, as Jesus concludes his time with the Father, when he utters his final amen, he stands firm in his identity. And as the rest of the passion narrative unfolds, it's clear he's the one in charge.

Immediately upon standing up, we see a band of soldiers approach him, some scholars anticipate maybe 600 present. Jesus asks them, who is it that you seek? They said, Jesus of

Nazareth. He simply responds, I am He. The Greek word, for "I am," "Ego eimi," is the same root for the Hebrew sacred name of Yahweh. It's upon uttering these words that the scriptures say the band of soldiers drew back and immediately fell to the ground in response to his divinity and authority.

Yet, for me personally, one of the more most intriguing interactions of the passion narrative is that which takes place between Jesus and Pilot. Pilot has been reluctantly drawn into these events by the Jewish leaders who ultimately need his authority and approval to crucify Jesus as he is the Governor of Judea. So, after the religious leaders interrogate Jesus and they come up with some things to accuse him of, they bind him and take him to Pilot's headquarters and Jesus is taken inside. But even the religious leaders stay outside because to enter into Gentile dwelling would make them unclean.

And so, they begin to accuse Jesus of misleading the nation by identifying himself as a king. In each of the gospel accounts we find that Pilot bursts into his headquarters, and the first recorded words we have him asking Jesus, are you a king? Jesus answers him as he has so many times before with a question of his own. Is that your idea, or are you just echoing the idea of those who called on you? Jesus in that moment is trying to see where is it that Pilot is coming from? Is Pilot genuinely interested in who Jesus is? Depending on how Pilot answers, the question will determine how Jesus answers. If Pilot is asking, are you a king in that you're trying to conspire against Caesar, the answer would be no. But if Jesus is the long-awaited Messianic King, the answer would be yes.

Pilot is kind of offended for a couple of reasons. One, he's the one who's supposed to be doing the interrogating, and yet Jesus is not intimidated in the least. Second, Pilot is offended because Jesus is suggesting that Pilot, a Gentile, is interested in Jewish affairs. And so, he responds, am I a Jew? What do I care if you're the messianic king, some king you are. Your own people have turned you over to me. What have you done to fail so miserably as a king? Jesus, in what may be his most revealing response since being under trial, says these words. "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

In this response, Jesus isn't saying that His kingdom has no place in this world. Jesus' kingdom will in fact materialize, and it will exist in time and space. What he is saying is that his kingdom will not be brought about by worldly means or with worldly values. Kingdoms in that day were brought about through violence, aggression, murder, and dominance. Once kingdoms and nations gained power, they had to constantly guard against the threat of losing it. Threats outside and threats inside. So, they would manipulate people and try to incite fear to remain in control.

Jesus isn't interested in Rome at all. For Jesus' servants to come and fight and deliver him from being arrested and put to death, would be to settle for a kingdom that is far below his worth. Jesus is set on completing his mission and establishing a kingdom of His own kingdom that will be built on righteousness and justice. A kingdom that will perpetuate harmony and peace for every creature and every place. A kingdom that will result in prosperity and the abundance of joy and life. A kingdom that will break forth and be eternally secured on Easter morning with the resurrection.

After this exchange, Pilot seems to be a bit shaken and kind of disturbed. Three times he declares Jesus innocent and tries to get Jesus released even when Pilot knows that he's lost and Jesus is going to be put on the cross, he places the accusation on top that says, this is the king of the Jews. His accusers say, hey, don't write that, say that He says he is the king of the Jews. Going back to when Pilot does finish interrogating Jesus, he brings Jesus out and he says, Behold, your King, to which the religious leaders vehemently respond, we have no king but Caesar.

If we learn anything from Good Friday, it's that to reject Jesus as king in no way cancels his kingdom. To those who do receive him, we have this hope of a kingdom. We have this kingdom that's to come. He's not anxious to be getting on the ballot. Jesus' kingdom is not up for election, which with the year that we still have ahead of us, that's some of the best news we can ever hope for. For those who do receive him as king, we now embody his kingdom principles. Love God with all our hearts, with all that we are. We love our neighbors as ourselves. We bless those who curse us and do good to those who do evil to us. We take heart. We take heart because there is no power or authority that can come against Jesus's kingdom. We watch for the Lord's return, and we pray for His Kingdom to advance through all the Earth. We rejoice in hope. We rejoice in the hope of one day crying out with a victorious cry with all the saints and the elders saying this. "The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah. And He will reign forever and ever." Amen.