

Story #3: Your Deliverance,
Pt. 4
Our Lamb

The Three Stories of the
Bible

John 1:29-36
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An eccentric old man on his death bed called his three most trusted friends to his bedside. To his lawyer, physician and pastor each, he gave an envelope that he wanted put in his coffin at the funeral. "They say that you can't take it with you," the old man groaned. "I've put fifty grand in each envelope, and I'm going to see if it arrives with me in heaven." At the funeral, each friend slipped the envelope into the coffin just before it was closed. They looked at each other with an awkward glance that was somewhat troubling, and then went on their way. Three years later they ran into each other near a restaurant and decided to have coffee and reminisce about their deceased friend. During the conversation, after a moment of silence, the lawyer said that he must make a confession. He could not see wasting \$50,000 in cash. There was something morally wrong about that. He had left only \$10,000 in the envelope and had taken \$40,000 out. He had given it all to a local homeless shelter in memory of their friend. The physician was now conscience-stricken. He confessed that he had lifted \$10,000 out of the envelope, purchased surgical instruments and donated it to a missionary hospital in memory of the man. The pastor was furious. He was outraged. Such betrayal of trust could not be justified by acts of charity, and he made that plain to them. "When you agree, you stand by your agreement," he instructed them. "The man wanted to be buried with \$50,000 in the envelope I carried," the pastor said, "and I didn't short him a dime." There was silence in that restaurant booth. The pastor could tell that the two others were feeling guilty, so he went on for emphasis. "There was \$50,000 in the envelope that I left in the coffin. Look in my checkbook and see the duplicate to prove it!"

Some of you may be just waking up to the punch line that the pastor substituted a personal check for the cash, and that there is no chance that check will go through since the American banking system has yet to establish a branch in heaven. The joke, however, tells us something about our moral vision. Our knowledge of good and evil is not a blessing. It's a handicap. It makes us umpires in life although we are not qualified. It makes us independent judges who are competitors rather than companions of God. The

Bible tells that story. Really, it tells only three stories. It speaks of our design, death and deliverance. Story #1 is that we were designed in God's image to live as God's children and companions. When, however, Adam and Eve took the fruit from *the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, they were changed forever. They and we through them embraced a vision and wisdom that destroyed our companionship and made us susceptible to deception and domination. This vision, deception and domination needed to come to an end. Death came as a curse but also as a solution. That is story #2. Story #3 tells of our deliverance. This story begins in Genesis 3 and unfolds throughout the rest of the Bible. Every event of Jesus' life contributes to your deliverance. Over the last three weeks, we've consider how Christ's birth, anointing with the Spirit, and testing by Satan all impact our deliverance. On Wednesday evenings, we've reflected more on Jesus' ministry and our deliverance, and also our ministry of deliverance as disciples. Today, we'll discover more about our deliverance.

At the time of Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist said something stunning. He pointed to Jesus and said, "*Look, there is the Lamb of God.*" On two occasions he did that. He told folks that he was baptizing them as an act of repentance so they'd be forgiven; however, this man, the Lamb of God, would take away the sins of the world. The Scriptures show us that Jesus understood that. He told his followers that he came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. The disciples did not understand what he meant until after his death and resurrection. Then Paul could look at Jesus and identify him as our Passover lamb who brought us deliverance. Peter would identify him as a lamb without blemish or defect and declare that we are redeemed from "an empty way of life" by the precious blood of Christ who was chosen before the creation of the world. John called Jesus the lamb slain from the creation of the world. In other words, before God made Adam and Eve, he knew the pain that would come, and he planned for your and my redemption before he made a single human being. God created humanity with redeeming love. He knew our sin before we ever committed it. He knew your problems before you were born. Your Father made you anyway. He chose you anyway. He loves you anyway. Why do you wrestle with guilt and fear when God planned for its removal. Stop beating yourself with guilt; instead, confess it and accept the forgiveness that comes from the Lamb of God. Only when you enjoy that forgiveness have you escaped sin's power. Then the Lamb has taken away your sins. Therefore, John saw every creature in heaven and on earth, under the earth, on the sea and in the sea singing to the Lamb. The Lamb will be worshiped because of his sacrifice and impact on all humanity.

It is interesting that God chose a young and innocent creature like a lamb to reveal his deliverance for us. For the earliest followers of God, the lamb played an important role. The lamb provided a future. Abraham and his Israelite descendants were shepherds. The young lamb was their future. It was their livelihood. It was their fortune. When they sacrificed a lamb, they were yielding their future to God. They were declaring their dependence upon God for their provision. The lamb's role was also to confront sin. Each time a lamb was sacrificed, a lesson was taught. Despite human attempts to minimize and rationalize their actions, the young and innocent suffer from our sins. Sin is never to be coddled. Sin is never to be indulged. It kills the innocent. There is no victimless vice. Don't ever believe that. Every sin causes carnage and harms the innocent and young.

Don't ever accommodate sin. Cry out to Jesus when you're caught in it. Cry out for help. Finally, the role of the young lamb was to serve as an innocent substitute for the people. People were learning that something or someone would pay the price for their freedom. Something or someone, who was totally innocent of our crime, would die for it. Life after judgment would be a precious, costly gift, not an achievement. We would be freed by the sacrifice of another.

What God did through the death of Jesus Christ is absolutely amazing. The death of Jesus as the Lamb of God exposes our desperate need. Our condition is desperate. I'm not sure many of us have come to grips with that. Many today are offended by the suggestion that God would require an innocent person to die. That violates their sense of justice. That does not fit with their vision of good and evil. When they hear that God gave up his Son Jesus to die for us, they don't see love. They suggest that the Christian God is guilty of child abuse. What good father would kill his son to prove his love. That would not be a revelation of love. That would be a revelation of callousness or craziness.

I once heard of a man whose little child got caught in the gears of a draw bridge. Because of the timing, the man had to lower the bridge and preserve all the lives riding in the passenger train which approached. He watched his young son die a horrible death in those gears because that was what was necessary to save all on the train. If it wasn't for the desperate situation, no sacrifice would have been made. That is what the cross exposes.

It also reveals the nature of sin. It is the nature of sin to devastate and destroy people. Excusing, diminishing or minimizing sin is deadly. It is like mislabeling lethal poison. The witness of God's lamb is that sin by nature is lethal. Jesus said that it is better to cut off your limbs than sin with them. As a result, the Bible identifies believers as saints not sinners. You're forgiven not to continue in deadly practices, but to become conduits of life. The expectations of a saint and sinner are totally different. I'd rather be a struggling saint than a comforted sinner.

The cross demonstrates God's sacrificial love. You are God's passion. That's what it took, passion. The cross unveils the harm and pain God embraced because of his intense desire for you. God's passionate for you, and the character of his love for you is forgiving and self-giving. That is who God is.

Finally, God's lamb displays God's greatness. Our God has *unfathomable love*. One just can't measure it or overestimate it. Moreover, God executes *unstoppable justice*. The world may be unfair, and unfairness and evil may prevail for a time, but that won't prevent justice and morality in the end. Even a cross can be turned to a crown. Furthermore God acts with *indescribable wisdom*. Who can trace his hand? Who can understand his way? Indeed, God works with *unmatchable power*. Nothing is able to hinder him. I've heard again and again people saying, "God is trying!" Don't believe it for a second. Listen to me. "God is doing!" And his doing is unmatchable. Because of that, he's *undeterred in purpose*! No matter how great the opposition, God will achieve what he sets out to do... and that is terrific! That's what the Lamb of God shows us.

Heed the call of John, the Baptist. "See, the Lamb of God." Your life won't be the same.