

The Savior and You

BELIEVERS' BOOT CAMP

John 1:28-42
November 9, 2003
Wesley J. Gabel

An amazing thing happened at a little village or oasis called Bethany. (I bet you've heard that name before). You know how there is a Rochester, New York and a Rochester, Minnesota? One name, two locations! Well, there was a Bethany next to Jerusalem where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived and where Jesus visited. There also was a Bethany much further north, just east of the Jordan River. At this Bethany our salvation was revealed.

Perhaps you remember the story of Jesus' baptism. When Jesus was baptized, he heard God's voice of affirmation and also experienced the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Now that is what Jesus experienced. John the Baptist also experienced something. He not only dunked Jesus in the Jordan, he said this:

I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, "When you see the Holy Spirit descending and resting upon someone, he is the one you are looking for. He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Son of God. (John 1:32-34, NLT)

At the moment of Jesus' baptism, we don't know if anyone beyond Jesus and John experienced anything different than normal. However, John began to point to Jesus and say:

Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29, NLT)

Now that phrase is a little bit confusing to me. The Jewish people would take a lamb of their own and sacrifice it to remove their guilt. However, John called Jesus "the lamb of God".

This was not a lamb belonging to the people. This was a lamb belonging to God. God was offering his own lamb rather than receiving ours. Salvation was coming as a gift to us rather than achievement by us. It was coming from God's own sacrifice. That is clear. What I didn't expect to see is the effect of the lamb. I expected John to say, "Look, the lamb of God who takes away the guilt of the world." Instead, John said this lamb "takes away the sin of the world." It is one thing to remove guilt. Isn't it a completely different thing to remove sin?

The removal of guilt implies the canceling or commuting of a penalty, doesn't it? For example, governors and presidents pardon people. At the end of Bill Clinton's term, he gave a controversial pardon to Marc Rich. The most famous pardon was granted by Gerald Ford to Richard Nixon. At that moment, all efforts to prosecute the former President ended. However, did canceling the penalty remove his guilt? I don't know whether Richard Nixon felt guilt before or after the pardon, but he still experience a social stigma. His pardon didn't eliminate that.

South Dakota's congressman, Bill Janklow, recently sped through a stop sign and killed a motorcyclist. He is facing second degree manslaughter and misdemeanors for running a stop sign and speeding. Even if the speed limit and stop sign were removed so he wouldn't have broken a law, wouldn't there still be remorse and guilt? I think of the woman who backed over her toddler in the driveway. The fact there was no legal penalty or social stigma did not prevent the experience of guilt. Condemnation may not have come from others; but it still came. Why? The nature of the act brought destruction and guilt.

The nature of sin as we explained last week is to violate our essence and purpose. Made in the image of God, we were created to reflect God's love and multiply his blessings. Instead, we *miss the mark*. We bring harm rather than blessing. We sew destruction and hurt.

Husbands and wives, isn't it true that as much as we desire and work to bless our spouses, they also suffer from our attitudes and actions? We may wish to trivialize that suffering. Indeed, that probably is the primary way we remove guilt. Trivialize the harm of our actions. It is dishonest. It is denial. It is Satan's way of moving us deeper into destructive behaviors. Minimizing or denying the consequence is his tactic, his inspiration. When you think, "What I did wasn't so bad or harmful," who's dominating your thinking?

The work of the lamb is not merely to remove the penalty or alleviate the feelings of guilt. Jesus, the Lamb of God, removes the condemnation and the source of condemnation. He takes away the sin of the world, not just its penalty.

How sin with all its hold and power is removed is amazing. Listen to Paul's words to Roman believers.

It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. (Romans 7:21-8:2, NLT)

The power of sin is so great that it can trap you as a slave, so that you are doing Satan's bidding even though you hate it. The weave of Satan's deception can control you despite your knowledge of truth. The answer as Paul says is Jesus Christ our Lord, the Lamb of God. In belonging to him, we are released from condemnation and receive freedom accomplished by the power of the life-giving Spirit.

We see more how that happens in Jesus' call to the Apostle Paul:

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting... Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness... I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (Acts 26:15-18, NIV)

Jesus was sending Paul to accomplish a powerful work in people's lives. The effect on people would be (1) a *new vision* – “open their eyes,” (2) a *new perspective* – “turn them from darkness to light,” (3) a *new freedom* – “from the power of Satan to God,” (4) a *new standing* – “forgiveness” and (5) a *new family* as people who are “sanctified” through faith in Jesus.

Jesus gives a *new vision* as his Spirit unveils God's merciful, pursuing love for us and the consequence of our sin in the cross. Eyes are opened. Many see the cross but the Spirit opens eyes to its meaning. Jesus provides a *new perspective* as we identify ourselves with his death and resurrection. The old life ended with Jesus' death and thus there is no condemnation. The person who was guilty is gone. Through faith in Christ's resurrection and the receiving of his Spirit, we are born a second time. We possess a new identity and relationship to the world. Everything is new. From this new birth come new desires and new thoughts. Because we no longer live under a cloud of condemnation and guilt, Satan loses power over us. We have a *new freedom*. We can sniff out the schemes that once dominated and destroyed our lives. Embracing our *new standing* in forgiveness, we belong to a *new family* in which we grow in our grasp of God's love, truth and character.

Can there be anything so life changing as a new vision, perspective, freedom, standing and family? Have your eyes been opened? Is your perspective changing? Are you sniffing out deceptive schemes and breaking free? Are you enjoying your new standing through forgiveness? Are you growing in your new family? At Bethany long ago, God revealed his salvation through the mouth of John. Today at Bethany what is God revealing to you?