

# THE LAMB OF GOD PICKS UP AND CARRIES AWAY – JOHN 1:29-41

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The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.” The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ).



This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it,

I have a few questions to ask of you this morning. First of all, how many of you have ever touched a lamb? Second, how many of you have eaten a meal consisting of lamb? And finally, how many of you have ever slaughtered a lamb, or seen it die right in front of you?

While there are 100 million or so cattle in our country, there are fewer than 6 million sheep. America is fast becoming a lamb-less society, a country where people know about lambs only from books and television, and not by experience. But lambs were the most abundant animal when John the Baptist spoke the words of our gospel, “**Look, the Lamb of God.**” Every one of John’s hearers would have touched lambs, tasted lambs, and many would have even slaughtered lambs. So they understood John’s words, “**Look, the Lamb of God**” a lot better than most of us.

When John the Baptist told them about this lamb, he was also telling them something about this lamb that would separate it from all other lambs. “**Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**” Put out of your mind for a moment the phrase, “sin of the world,” it’s something everybody knows. Instead, let’s focus on the verb. John says, “**the Lamb of God who takes away...**” In the Greek, the word which John used is the same word that modern Greeks use when they say, “The garbage man takes away my trash.” The Greek word that John used means to “pick up and carry away.” Now tell me, have you ever seen a lamb pick up and carry something away? And yet, the picture John paints is completely accurate, and is something we need to understand. THE LAMB OF GOD PICKS UP AND CARRIES AWAY.

1. Not only the sins of the world

## 2. But also the saints of his kingdom

(1)

Last week we heard about the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John. From what we can gather from the four gospels, this is what happened following the baptism. Jesus left the Jordan River quite quickly after his baptism and went off into the wilderness of Judea for 40 days fasting – having no food or no water. After he fasted he was tempted by Satan three times. In those six or so weeks imagine what John the Baptist might have been thinking. “I’m such an idiot, here I am supposed to point the way to the Messiah, the one whom I am preparing for, he comes, I baptize him, a voice from heaven shouts, ‘This is my Son whom I love,’ and all I can do is stand wide eyed and gawk at this whole spectacle. I didn’t tell people anything, I didn’t tell them who he was, and then he was gone.”

So when Jesus returned after his fasting and tempting in the wilderness, John made sure to rectify that mistake. When he saw Jesus he said, “**Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**” He picks up and carries the sin of the world. What were many people that day thinking when they heard lamb? They were not thinking of the cute and cuddly animal that we imagine in story books, but their first thought would have been a sacrifice. Lambs were the primary animal used in making sacrifices.

Adam and Eve’s son Abel worshiped the Lord by choosing, bringing, slaughtering and burning on an altar the best lamb from his flock. Every spring for 1,500 years, God’s people would gather to celebrate the Passover, where each and every family selected, slaughtered and roasted a perfect one year old male lamb. Every morning and evening at the Temple in Jerusalem, a perfect lamb was selected, slaughtered and burned on the altar. On special occasions, God’s people showed their whole hearted devotion to the Lord by selecting, slaughtering and burning on an altar a lamb.

If you were a female lamb, you were safe, they wouldn’t sacrifice you. If you were a lamb with some kind of defect, you don’t have to worry, they wouldn’t sacrifice you. But if you were a perfect, one-year old male lamb, then chances are you would be selected for sacrifice. That’s what God’s people thought when they heard John cry out, “**Look the Lamb of God who takes away** – picks up and carries – **the sin of the world.**” They thought sacrifice.

Besides the word “sacrifice” when John mentioned lamb, they also thought of the word “substitute.” All of those lambs didn’t die because they were wicked lambs or because they had done anything wrong. All of those lambs died because God’s people were by nature wicked. All of those lambs died because God’s people over and over again failed to live up to God’s absolute standard of perfection. The people – they were the ones who deserved to die. But the lambs – they died. They died because the sin and guilt of the people was transferred from them to the lambs. The lambs were their substitute. The lambs got what they, the people, deserved.

On Israel’s holiest day, the great Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the Lord commanded that the high priest was to lay both of his hands on the sacrificial animal and “**confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins.**” Through all of these sacrifices, God was teaching the Israelites that it is possible for something or someone to die in place of those who had sinned, to be a

substitute. When John the Baptist's hearers heard the word "lamb" they thought of sacrifice. They thought of substitute, they thought about the seriousness of sin.

The people of Israel recognized how serious their sin was each and every time they slaughtered a lamb. Even though the apostle Paul had not written his letter to the Romans, they realized that **"the wages of sin is death."** Even though the writer to the Hebrews had not penned these words, they realized that **"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."** But more than sacrifice, more than substitute, more than seriousness of sin, when God's people heard the word "lamb," and the phrase **"Lamb of God"** they thought of Savior. For in speaking of the coming Savior, the prophet Isaiah had declared, **"He was led like a lamb to the slaughter."**

Every week you likely have your trash collected. Whatever garbage you had in your house during that week, you throw into your trash can, roll it to the curb, and it's gone by morning. It is something that we often just take for granted. But even if we miss a week, I don't think a little bit of smelly trash is all that big of a worry for us. But when John the Baptist pointed and shouted, **"Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,"** he was declaring the precious truth that your sins and mine have been picked up and carried away so they can no longer drive us to despair, or worse, drive us to hell.

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It would be easy to say "Amen" at this point, and we could all go home and catch a little bit more of the football pregame show, but today's gospel doesn't end there. And Jesus being named the **"Lamb of God"** is not the only epiphany moment in our text. Not only does the Lamb of God pick up and carry away the sin of the world. He also picks up and carries away the saints of his kingdom. You can't have one without the other. Think about how he picked up and carried John the Baptist from an otherwise meaningless life to serve him. Chances are, without God choosing him to be the forerunner of the Messiah, we would never have even heard about him (not that John was looking for fame and fortune).

Look at how he picked up and carried two of John's disciples. When John the Baptist pointed and proclaimed, **"Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,"** they realized John was telling them to go and follow Jesus, not him. And so they did. They followed Jesus, and when he asked what they wanted, they responded with, **"where are you staying?"** But the disciples were interested in more than just where Jesus was staying, they were interested in seeking more information about him. Jesus did not turn them away, instead he said, **"Come and see."** The Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God picked them up and carried them away to seek him.

Consider also what one of those disciples did next. **"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah."** Jesus, the Lamb of God, picked up and carried away Andrew to share what he had found. The point is that Jesus, the Lamb of God, not only turns sinners into saints by picking up and carrying away their sins. He also changes the lives of those saints, leading them to serve him by serving others, seek him in his Holy Word, and share the good news about him with others.

Oh, make no mistake about it, the sinful nature that resides deeply (or not so deeply) within the heart of every Christian says the very opposite. Serve him? Forget it, take care of yourself, enjoy your

life. Seek to learn more about him? Why? You know enough already, no need to read the Bible or come to church. Share the good news with others? Come on, that's not my style, that's not what I'm supposed to do, someone else will take care of that.

But in our gospel, John the Baptist tells us something different. He says, **“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** Take a good look at him – what he has done for you, what he promises to do for you – and how can you not serve him? Take a good look at him – he knows better than you how your life can be satisfying, fulfilling, fun – how can you not seek to learn more about him and his ways? Take a good look at him – and remember that **“whoever does not believe will be condemned”** – and how can you not give to support missions and share your joy with your neighbor?

The Christian life is not just going to church on Sundays and worshiping the Lamb of God there. It's worshipping him every day. It's serving him, seeking to learn about him, sharing him with others. Holy Scripture adds one more thing to what Christ the Lamb of God does. Not only does he pick up and carry away the sins of the world. Not only does he pick up and carry away his saints to serve him, seek him, and share the good news about him. One day he will also pick up his saints and carry them away to spend eternal life with him in heaven. And what will happen then? Then comes the singing: **“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.”** Amen.