

Glory in His Face: Sacrificial Lamb

John 19:16-37

By [David Strain](#)

September 8, 2013

Now if you would please, turn with me in your copies of God's Word to John's gospel, chapter 19. John chapter 19. We're going to be reading from the sixteenth verse, halfway through the sixteenth verse, through verse thirty-seven. You'll find that on page 905 if you're using one of the church Bibles. So far in our reflections on the person and work of Christ, we've considered the union of deity and humanity in Christ, the compassionate heart of Christ that reaches out to us in mercy and love, and then last time we were thinking together about the radical obedience of Christ to the law and requirements of God. We were thinking about the one in whom the righteous requirements of God were fully met for us and in our place. There is another part to the work of Christ, however, which must never be divorced from the righteousness of Christ's obedient life, and that is the redemption won by His atoning death. And so tonight I want us to think together about a fourth glory to see in the face of Jesus Christ - the glory of Christ our sacrificial Lamb. So turn please to God's Word. Before we read it together, would you bow your heads with me as we turn to God in prayer? Let's pray.

Father, Your Word is a light to our path and a lamp to our feet. We pray, O Lord, that it would illumine our way, show us Christ in His perfect sufficiency, particularly as He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world by dying the just for the unjust to bring us to God. Come, and by Your Spirit, minister the Gospel of grace in life-giving and transforming power for the glory of the name of Jesus. Amen.

John 19 at verse 16. This is the point at which Jesus is sentenced to death by crucifixion. And we read:

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of

the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

"They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

Amen, and we praise God for this reading from His holy and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth on all our hearts.

In the movie, *Titanic*, as the ship sinks, the rich men on the ship begin to scramble for the inadequate number of lifeboats, pushing aside the women and children in their desperation to live. In the film, the sailors are compelled to draw weapons and fire pistols into the air and shout, "Stand back! Women and children

first!" In reality, however, when the Titanic actually sank, no such action was necessary. The testimony of survivors was that the men on board the ship instinctively hung back, urging the women and the children into the few lifeboats that were available, sacrificing themselves that the women and children might live. John Jacob Astor, who was at that time the richest man in the world, was aboard the ship. He dragged his wife to a lifeboat and when he pushed her on board he stepped back. When he was urged to climb on board too he refused. "The women and children should go first," he said. And that was a story repeated over that fateful day. When *The New York Times* reviewed the movie, *Titanic*, the producer and the director of the film were asked in the review why they had distorted the facts so deliberately. And the reviewer's own answer was this. I think it's telling. The reviewer believes, had they told the truth, no one would have credited it as true at all. No one would have believed it.

Things have changed in our culture. The kind of heroic self-sacrifice that was considered simply part of the course of duty, perhaps a century ago, is now seen to be so incredible a choice that movie-goers are likely to dismiss it as Hollywood exaggeration were it to be depicted on the big screen. This idea of substitutionary sacrifice has become so incredible to modern minds that the Bible's own presentation of the work of Jesus Christ as a substitute, dying to appease the wrath of God in the place of sinners, has also been dismissed as uncouth and distasteful, even sub-Christian. Recently the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, we are the PCA, the PCUSA, recently rejected the hymn we sang together as our evening hymn, the song, "In Christ Alone," because the authors would not agree to modify some of the language. The offending line in the original song is, "Til on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied." The PCUSA would not admit into their hymnals a song that teaches a doctrine of the cross in which Jesus dies as our substitute paying our penalty.

Nor is it simply mainline churches and liberal theological groups who've brought this incredulity towards substitution to bear in their thinking about the cross. In 2003, a professing evangelical, a leader in the church scene in the United Kingdom, a man called Steve Chalke, wrote critically about the death of Christ as an atoning sacrifice, paying our penalty. He caricatured the Biblical presentation to dismiss it as a monstrosity, calling the idea of substitutionary death, Christ in our place, a form of cosmic child abuse that no sane Christian could ever possibly hope to believe in. That's how he views the classic Christian teaching that God would pour out His wrath on Christ as our representative and substitute - a monstrous thing. Cosmic child abuse is what he names it.

Not only can we no longer find the idea of self-sacrifice for the salvation of another credible, we can't find it credible any longer, it seems we now consider the idea of substitutionary sacrifice immoral and disgusting. To suggest, in Steve Chalke's vision of things at least, that Jesus died in my room and stead, to satisfy the wrath of a holy God, is to make God into a monster. And yet the Christian Gospel insists, its contemporary detractors notwithstanding, that there is no other

way to be reconciled to God except through the death of Jesus Christ as our substitute. Only by Christ, bearing in Himself the penalty of sin in the place of believing sinners, is there any hope for any of us. There is no other way to be reconciled to God, no other way to peace or pardon, no other good news for you or me but that Christ has paid our debts, settled our accounts, borne our condemnation, satisfied the demands of justice in our place.

Now there are various ways that the New Testament makes that point. What I want to do with you this evening is to trace the way that John's gospel in particular develops that substitutionary sacrifice theme. I want to begin, actually, not where we read in Scripture, if you like, at the end at Jesus' earthly ministry - almost at the end of it - but at the very beginning of John's gospel in John 1 in verse 29. At the dawn of his public ministry, John 1:29, when Jesus comes to be baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, when John sees Jesus what does he say? "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Now that statement coming at the very head of Jesus' public ministry, becomes problematic for the narrative to follow. There's a sense in which the whole of John's gospel is an explanation of these words in John 1:29. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And John's main strategy for explaining that statement is to link Jesus' sin-bearing work to Old Testament sacrifice and particularly to the Feast of Passover.

Noticing how Passover is used as a motif in the gospel of John, will be a key in understanding how it is that Jesus is God's sin-atoning Lamb who takes away our sin. Nine times in John's gospel the Passover is mentioned and in each case there is an allusion to the death of Christ. Two references in John chapter 2 - John 2:13 and John 2:23 - bracket Jesus' invitation to the Pharisees to "destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." He's speaking about His death and His resurrection. John 6:4, the Passover is mentioned as the context for the feeding of the five thousand. And there is a large crowd - five thousand are assembled - and Jesus takes opportunity, then, to teach them. And in verses 51 to 56, with the image of Passover in everyone's mind, He tells the crowd if they wish to have everlasting life they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. He's speaking again about His death. He will be the source of life, the life-giver, and if you are to believe in Him, His body broken and blood shed, life will come from Him to you.

And then John's gospel turns to focus in on one Passover in particular, the Passover that would be Jesus' last. In John 11:55, we are told Passover was coming. Everyone in Jerusalem was wondering, "Will Jesus show up?" There was so much controversy now attending His ministry. Will He risk coming to the capital for the feast? In chapter 12 verse 1, we're told that He will in fact come to the feast, at least a little later in chapter 13:1 we find out that He is in Jerusalem. 12:1 initiates a kind of countdown to that final Passover. It says six days before the Passover Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There, remember, Mary anointed Jesus' feet

with perfume and that was an action Jesus interpreted as preparation for His burial. We see again Passover and Jesus' thinking about His death and talking about His death. A few days later we find Jesus finally in the city, preparing for Passover. Chapter 13 verse 1 we're told, "Now before the feast of Passover, when Jesus knew His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." Again, you see the connection - Passover and the death of Jesus. He loves His disciples all the way to the end, knowing He is about to depart by way of the cross. The cross looms so large, casting its shadow over this last Passover.

In verse 2 of chapter 13, John goes on to say that Jesus sat down for a meal with His disciples. Almost certainly that is a reference to the Last Supper. We have to turn to Matthew, Mark, and Luke to find out what happened at that meal, but it's familiar to you from our own celebrations of the Lord's Supper. That was the Passover meal itself where Jesus took the elements of the Passover. "He took the bread and when He had given thanks He broke it and said, 'This is My body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' And likewise He took the cup after supper saying, 'This cup is poured out for you. It is the new covenant in My blood.'" He's speaking again about His death and its meaning. Taking the very elements of the Passover celebration itself and instead of the ancient liturgy prescribed to go along with that celebration, with set questions and answers that were required to be used, He transforms the ritual with new explanatory language, showing how the whole thing points to and focuses our attention on Him. He is identifying Himself as the true Passover Lamb. We are to eat the bread and drink the wine and feed by faith on Him.

And as we move from the Last Supper to Jesus' trial, John keeps the Passover before us. In chapter 18 verse 19, the religious leaders bring Christ to Pilate for judgment, but they won't come into Pilate's home because we're told they did not want to be ritually defiled by contact with a Gentile at the time of the Passover and thus be unable to participate in the feast. Now if ever there was an example of the way we can use religion to deceive ourselves and hide our sin this is it. They don't want to be unable to eat the Passover so they will not enter a Gentile's home but they do not see the deeper uncleanness, the monstrous rebellion against God festering in their hearts that allows them to sanction the betrayal and the brutalization of God's own Messiah, the One to whom the whole Passover itself pointed them - our true Passover Lamb, the Lord Jesus.

Then in verse 14 of chapter 19 we're told that the trial, the condemnation, and the crucifixion took place on the Day of Preparation for the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. Now there is debate among scholars about the precise timetable of events here but a good case can be made that John's chronology makes Jesus' death occur simultaneously with the sacrifice of the Passover lambs. Now think about that - the original Passover, remember, was the pivot point in the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It was because of the Passover that God's people went free. But here as that great moment was

commemorated and the Paschal lambs are slain, here is a greater redemption and eternal deliverance won for God's people by the One whom John has called the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And then in John 19:31-36, we learn that since it was the Day of Preparation, the day before the Sabbath, and the Jewish custom was not to leave victims on the cross on the Sabbath day, the Roman guards began to break the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus to speed up their demise. When they came to Jesus, however, they did not break His legs because they found He was already dead. And then John says this. "These things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: 'Not one of His bones will be broken.'" The Scripture being fulfilled is most likely Exodus 12:46 which mandates that none of the bones of the Passover lamb were to be broken.

You get the point by now, I hope. When John pointed to Jesus that day on the banks of the Jordan River and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes the world's sin away!" he meant Jesus was the true and final Passover Lamb. As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Remember what Passover meant? The children of Israel were slaves in Egypt; Moses was told God is going to send the angel of death throughout the land to kill all the firstborn sons. The people of God were to kill a lamb, roast its meat for a meal together, and the blood of the lamb was to be sprinkled on the doorposts and the on the lintels of their homes. When the angel of death visited, the angel passed over the Israelites with the blood on their doors and destroyed only the firstborn of Egypt. It was not that the Israelites were smarter or better than the Egyptians. It was not that the ritual with the lamb's blood somehow magically manipulated the supernatural powers then in operation. It was rather that, equally exposed to judgment as were Egypt, every inch as guilty as the Egyptians, Israel, nevertheless, had a substitute. Another had died in place of the firstborn of Israel. A lamb was slain that they might live. The blood of the lamb was the signal that sin had been paid for and justice was fully satisfied. And that, John has been telling us, was all designed by God to be a picture pointing us to the cross of Jesus Christ. There, the Lamb of God Himself, was sacrificed for all of God's people that anyone who believes might not die but have everlasting life. His blood is now our covering. His death has brought you life. The wrath of God passes over all who find their refuge under the covering of His blood.

THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

That means two things. Two implications from all of that as we conclude. It means first of all that there is only one way to be right with God and that is by means of the blood of the Lamb. You must have the Pascal Lamb's blood over your door if the angel of death is to pass you by. You must have Jesus, the Lamb of God, to take away your sin. Your sin! Maybe you listen to the story about how unbelievable the very idea of heroic self-sacrifice was to the producers of the

Titanic and you shook your head sadly of what has become of our culture. Maybe as you heard me relate the facts of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America's rejection of "In Christ Alone" you rolled your eyes at the latest defection of liberals from the truth. Maybe you were scandalized to learn even some who claim to be evangelical, Bible-believing Christians have now rejected the substitutionary death of Christ as the very heart and essence of the Gospel. But if we think we can confess the truth about Christ crucified accurately, while living as though sin were something we could take care of ourselves, we are doing exactly the same thing. We show at least as much disdain for Christ our substitute as the wayward culture or a liberal church if we confess the truth with our mouths about His death in our place but actually are trusting our own efforts to deal with the guilt of sin in our lives.

A few years ago, carbon offsetting came into vogue. Are you familiar with that concept? The idea was that a celebrity could, a celebrity with a conscience could still fly their jet around the world so long as they drove a Prius at home and paid to protect a few acres of rainforest. They could offset whatever damage their pollution did to the planet. That's the idea. Pollute freely and then offset the damage later! Could it be that some of us are trying to deal with our sin like that? Could it be that deep down I really do still think that with a little kindness here or there I can offset my lust or my anger or my prejudice so that I don't really have to face my sin before God in repentance after all? Are you trying to dismiss your guilt about the affair or the porn or the tax evasion with a little philanthropy to balance the scales? "I'm on the board of the charity. I'm a major donor to the fundraiser. That's got to count for something, right?" Maybe you even think that a fresh dusting of religion on Sunday works wonders for a conscience you have been busy soiling and searing all week long. Now sure if you're asked you'll say the right thing - "Jesus died in my place. That's how I'm saved." Is that how you live? Is that how you live? Is it possible that you are not living clinging to Christ alone for mercy to deal with your sin? You're busy engaged in spiritual carbon offsetting - pollute freely; offset your sin later.

Long ago, Saint Anselm responded to those who suggested that the death of Christ wasn't really necessary. You can do some good works to deal with our sin problem. He said, "No, no, you have not yet considered how heavy the weight of sin is." His point was this. Jesus died because the weight of sin was such, the gravity of our offense against God was such that no one could hope to pay our penalty. You can't do it! Religion won't do it, prayer won't do it, charity won't do it - spiritual carbon offsetting does not work! Only Jesus Christ, crucified in your place, bearing your shame and your condemnation away, paying your penalty, satisfying justice for you - only Jesus, the Lamb of God, can deal with the guilt of your sin. Repentance means in part that you stop trying to clean yourself up before you come to God. And instead it means that you finally determine to get real with God about your own inability to deal with sin on your own. I wonder if God isn't calling you back to repentance tonight, to turn from your failed efforts at self-salvation to rest on Christ, the Lamb of God, who alone takes away the sin of

the world.

BOUGHT WITH A PRICE

And then very, very briefly, the second thing Jesus' substitutionary death means is if you do trust Him, you don't belong to you anymore. You have been bought at a price. 1 Peter 1:14-16, we're exhorted "not to be conformed to the passions of our former ignorance, but as He who called us is holy, so we also are to be holy in all our conduct. For it is written: 'You shall be holy for I am holy.'" But then he says, "Here's the grounds of that exhortation. Here's what should compel you to live a life that honors God." He says, "Do all of this knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." You don't live for you anymore because you don't own you anymore. You belong to Jesus Christ. You are His. He has paid for you with His life. And He calls you to live for His glory.

What does it mean to have Jesus as our sacrificial Lamb? It means there is no other way to be right with God but through Him, so repent of your spiritual carbon offsetting and turn to Jesus Christ. And it means if you trust Him, not only is He yours, wonderfully, but you are His, and so you are to live for His praise and for His glory.

Will you pray with me?

Our Father, we bless You that Jesus is our Passover Lamb, that He has died so that we might live. Forgive us for saying the right thing and then still trusting ourselves, our own efforts, to deal with the guilt of sin. We would flee together now to Christ alone, asking that for His sake You may have mercy on us. And as we trust Him, help us please to live for His glory knowing that we are not our own; we have been bought with a price. In Jesus' name, amen.

Would you stand and receive God's benediction?

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.

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