



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: John 1:29-37

“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* 30 This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32 And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God!”* 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.” (John 1:29-37 ESV)

I. Sin: The Barrier Between Humans & God (Is. 59:2)

A. Evidence of that barrier (Jn. 1:10; 8:19; 7:28)

B. All people are separated from God (Jn. 14:6b)

C. What sin looks like in John’s Gospel

1. Not knowing God (Jn. 16:8-9)

- “Sin in John’s Gospel, is...a relational It is unbelief or alienation from God, &...therefore the opposite of faith...[S]in...means not comprehending the truth about God & Jesus...” (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 65)

2. Opposing God – when the truth (LIGHT) comes & shows us the darkness in our heart we reject it

- “Sin in John’s Gospel is depicted as opposition to God & Jesus (3:20; 15:22-4).” (C. Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 66)
3. Blind to our own condition (Jn. 8:33)
- “Sin in John’s Gospel, is...not knowing the truth about oneself. It’s a blindness to one’s own condition.” (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 66)
4. Death – separated from the source of life
- “Sin is closely linked to death...In John’s Gospel, death is a process. If true life is lived in relationship with God, then those who are hostile to God separate themselves from the source of life. Their relationship with God dies, even while their bodies are still functioning.” (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 66)
5. Unbelief (Jn. 16:8-9)
- “When [the Spirit] he will convict the world about sin...because they do not believe in me [Christ].” (16:8-9)
 - “He will convict the world in respect of sin...’ (16:8-9). In the Fourth Gospel this applies *especially to the sin of unbelief* in Jesus Christ...” [Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, p. 425]
 - “Jesus indicated that *the great sin* that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of would be *unbelief in the Son*.” [AF. Johnson, RE. Webber, *What Christians Believe*, p. 201]
 - “Sin, which in the 4th Gospel occurs primarily in the singular, *shows itself in unbelief* & rejection of Jesus...Sin in the 4th Gospel is the state that characterizes those who have rejected the One who embodies life-giving revelation. Unbelief is sin par excellence...” [S. Hamid-Khani, *Revelation & Concealment of Christ*, p. 400]

D. What sin’s solution *doesn’t look like* in John’s Gospel: Penal Substitutionary Atonement

1. The ‘Lamb of God’ removes the Sin of Unbelief (Jn. 1:29; 8:24; 16:8-9)
- “Sin in John’s Gospel, is...a relational It is unbelief or alienation from God, &...therefore the opposite of faith...[S]in...means not comprehending the truth about God & Jesus...” (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 65)
 - John the Baptist “saw Jesus...& said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” (1:29 ESV) The Spirit “will convict the world about sin...because they do not believe in me [Christ].” (16:8-9)
 - “I told you that...if you do not believe that I am he, *you will die in your sins*.” (8:24)
 - “*John’s Gospel does not focus on the legal penalty for sin* but on the matter of sin itself. It does not say that *the Lamb* takes away ‘guilt’ but that he takes away sin – he removes unbelief. The gospel [of John] does not relate Jesus’ death to the need for divine justice but to the need for human faith. When the gospel speaks of the wrath of God, it says that wrath threatens those who do not believe (3:36). When Jesus tells his opponents that they will die in their sins, he adds that they will die in their sins unless they ‘believe’ (8:24). When the Advocate, the Spirit, comes to convict the world of sin after Jesus returns to the Father, readers are told that the sin is that the world does not ‘believe’ (16:8-9). According to the Gospel of John, people fall under divine judgment because of unbelief, & they are delivered from divine judgment by being brought to faith (3:17).” (Craig Koester, *Words of Life*, p. 115)
2. God’s Lamb takes away Sin (Unbelief) to create a ‘Relationship of Faith’
- In John’s Gospel, “The Lamb is sacrificed to create a relationship of faith in the face of the alienation created by sin... The sacrificial dimension accents the singular quality of what God does through the death of Jesus. Many lambs were slaughtered at Passover, but *Jesus is the Lamb of God in the singular*...Jesus’ death is a unique & definitive action. The Lamb of God is *the Lamb from God, the Lamb that God provides*.” [Craig Koester, “*Death of Jesus & the Human Condition...John’s Gospel*,” in J. R. Donahue (ed.) *Life in Abundance*, p. 148]
3. “Lamb of God” *Not* for Penal Substitutionary Atonement

- “Many Christians unjustifiably assume penal substitutionary atonement theories when reading any NT texts. In this view God’s justice demands a legal payment as the penalty for human sin. Rather than each sinful person having to pay that price, Jesus is substituted... The issue already arises in the Gospel of John...when Jesus is referred to as ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (1:29) & where Jesus dies...at the time when the sacrifice of the Passover lambs occurred in the Temple. Technically speaking, the Passover lamb was not a sacrifice for sin (so no particular theory of atonement is in view), but symbolized deliverance from death...Rather than presenting a notion of penal substitutionary atonement, John depicts Jesus as dying to reconcile an alienated world to its God by overcoming the world’s hostility through belief. When the love of God, conveyed through the death of Jesus, overcomes the sin of unbelief by evoking faith, it delivers people from the judgment of God by bringing them into true relationship with God... There’s no suggestion that dying ‘for’ people equals paying the legal penalty for sin. The 4th Gospel has a different understanding of sacrifice.” (Jaime Clark-Soles, 1, 2, 3 John, in M Aymer (ed.) *Fortress Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*, p. 696)

4. What is ‘Forensic Penal Substitutionary Atonement’?

- Forensic “Penal Substitutionary Atonement assumes the logic of the law court [hence ‘forensic’; God is the Judge]. Sin is understood as law-breaking, and so necessarily attracts a penalty [hence ‘penal’]. In dying on the cross, [as our substitute] Jesus pays the penalty [makes ‘atonement’] for all those who are saved, and so they are freed from their deserved punishment [& legally declared righteous, ‘justified’]. God’s justice is satisfied by Jesus’ death.” [Stephen R. Holmes, “*Penal Substitution*,” in A. J. Johnson (ed.) *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, p. 295]
- “By most accounts...the penal substitution theory consists of 5 fundamental & common constituents:
 - Christ’s atonement is necessary to the full scope of his redemptive work.
 - Christ dies as a substitute for (individual) human beings,
 - Christ dies in order to absorb the (penal) consequences of divine justice & wrath precipitated by the sin of humanity, being treated by God as if he were those individuals to whom the punishment were due.
 - Christ’s death pays a debt of punishment.
 - Christ’s death is a vicarious sacrifice.” [JR. Farris, SM. Hamilton, “...on Penal Substitution,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie [NZST]*, Vol. 63 #2 (2021) p.]
- This theory’s major focus is: “how Christ delivers people from the terrors of God’s retributive justice as a penal substitute...We [have]...one simple question: Is that it? Retribution [punishment for sins, etc.] & deliverance from it – this is all Christ *died* for? Is that really the *full* picture of divine justice & atonement that the Scripture testifies to...?” [JR. Farris, SM. Hamilton, “...*Penal Substitution*,” *NZST*, V. 63 #2 (2021) p.]

5. In John’s Gospel Christ’s sacrifice is not for Penal Substitutionary Atonement (that’s based on Paul)

- In “John’s distinctive account of the Atonement & Passion...the *Atonement is not understood*, as...in Paul’s letters, *in forensic terms as penal or substitutionary sacrifice* according to which God’s wrath has been paid for by the ransom of Christ [Mk. 10: 45; Mt. 20:28]. The language of expiation & reconciliation is typical of the Paul[’s] epistles (2 Cor. 5:20-22; 1 Cor. 6:20)...A Pauline theology of *objective atonement & expiatory sin* [-sacrifice] *as the means to salvation is largely absent in John*, whose theology is *fundamentally revelatory* in its *emphasis on redemption through knowledge & the hearing of Christ’s Word*. John will, of course, treat...sin & the Passion, even employing the language of sacrifice, as in John the Baptist’s proclamation—‘Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (1:29)...Yet, for John, the Incarnation [& crucifixion] serves Not to satisfy divine justice through God’s mercy, but rather to foster belief and evoke faith among the disciples...*Christ’s mission is not to substitute himself for creaturely sin so much as to reveal agape* [God’s love] *through his own intimate & eternal relationship with the Father*.” [Paul Cefalu, *Johannine Renaissance in Early Modern English Literature & Theology*, pp. 17-18]

- “John’s language differs from...[that] of scholars who assume that if the gospel uses sacrificial language it must construe Jesus’ death as a vicarious or substitutionary sacrifice...*The Fourth Gospel*, however, *operates with a different theological framework*. [It] does not relate Jesus’ death to the *need for divine justice* but the *need for human faith*...Readers are told that the sin that brings judgment is the world’s unbelief (16:8-9)...The death of Jesus...by evoking faith...delivers people from judgment...by bringing them into true relationship with God. This is *atonement in the Johannine sense*...” [Craig Koester, “*Death of Jesus & the Human Condition...John’s Gospel*,” in R. Donahue (ed.) *Life in Abundance*, pp. 147-8]
 - “Rather than...penal substitution views...Jesus’ death benefits others because it is the means by which he gives himself to & for them & at the same time brings them to give themselves to God & others so as to obtain eternal life...” [David A. Brondos, *Jesus’ Death in NT Thought*, p. 1060]
 - “Supporters of penal substitution theories are quick to point [to] the agony in the garden, [& the] ‘cup’ which Jesus prayed to have taken from him (Mk. 14:36)...In the 4th Gospel, Jesus’ rebuke to Peter coheres with what Mark reports: ‘*Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?*’ (18:11). Jesus doesn’t ask: ‘*Am I not to drink the cup the Father has imposed on me & with which the Father is punishing me?*’ Rather, here...he freely accepts the violent death he is to undergo... More than the other Gospels, John uses juridical language...Yet *never does this Gospel suggest that God passed judgment on Jesus in his passion or at any other time...John’s Gospel... offers no support for the theory that for the sake of human redemption the Father judged, condemned & punished the Son*. The language of judgment is there, but it is used in a different way.” [Gerald O’Collins, *Interpreting Jesus*, p. 153]
6. Christ’s death not to appease God’s wrath, but to give us life & joy
- “The 4th Gospel *does not say...Christ died for our sins: John’s Christ died that we may have life*” – Natalie Watson
 - “Rather than a *propitiation of the wrath of God...Jesus’ death embodies divine love &...is intended to bring in his followers the fullness of joy & life*.” –Jason Ripley

II. Outside Help: God Steps into the World (Jn. 1:14)

A. God sends His Son & sends John the Baptist (Jn. 3:16-17)

- “Sending presupposes that God is separated from the world & yet engaged with the world...For a genuine relationship to exist this gap must be overcome...Rather than accepting separation, God engages the world.” (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, 33)

B. God’s intervention

- “Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’...What’s crucial...is the simplicity & power of the actual exclamation, its implication of God’s intervention on a worldwide scale.” (Thomas Brodie, *John*, 152-3)

III. ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who Takes Away the Sin of the World’ (Jn. 1:29)

- “Jesus is the Lamb provided by God, [here]...not in his capacity as one who will humble himself to death, but in his God-given power & authority to take away the sin of the world & thus to open the way to God for the whole ” (Herman Ridderbos, *John*, p. 67)

A. Behold = a command to look, see, perceive – the tense means, “Look now!” “Don’t delay!” “Do not procrastinate!”

B. The Lamb of God – (Lat.) ‘*agnus dei*’ – (Gk.) ‘*amnos*’, a sacrificial lamb (Jn. 1:29; 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:19)

- “Introducing Jesus as the lamb at the beginning of the Gospel anticipates his death at the Passover at the end of the Gospel... To account for the connection between the Lamb of God & sin, some suggest that the Gospel combines Passover with that of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, who is compared to a lamb that is led to the slaughter &... is said to bear the sins of many.” (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 113)
- “The Baptist’s reference to Jesus as, ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ in 1:29 likely involves multiple levels of meaning.... [T]he Baptist here [is] thinking primarily of the Lamb led to the slaughter referred to in Isaiah 53:7...” (G.K. Beale & D.A. Carson, *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT*, 428)

1. What might John refer to when he says ‘the Lamb of God’?

- a. The Passover lamb (Jn. 19:36)
- b. The sacrificial lamb “led to the slaughter” (Is. 53:7)
- c. The lamb of the daily sacrifice (Ex. 29:38-39)
- d. The Gentle Lamb (Jer. 11:19)
- e. The scapegoat (Lev. 16:8-10)
- f. The triumphant lamb (Rev. 5:6)
- g. The God-provided lamb (Gen. 22:8)
- h. A guilt or sin offering (Lev. 14:24; 4:32) (Leon Morris, *John*, 141-2)

2. A general allusion to sacrifice

- “The title ‘Lamb of God’... has echoes of a suffering servant, a sacrificial lamb, a [Passover] lamb, and an apocalyptic lamb... Various streams of thought flow together in this Johannine title for The evangelist has constructed a new picture of the significance of Jesus.” (B. Chacko, *Intercultural Christology in John*, pp 121-2)
- “By merging many OT ideas, John indicates that Jesus’ death & its effects are no longer limited to Judaism but are for the whole world. By applying this title for Jesus, John subverts the exclusive, racial, & nationalistic Jewish idea... & makes it available for everyone... through... Jesus.” (B. Chacko, *Intercultural*... 95-96)
- “Through the history... several different lambs have been proposed as background of the expression [‘Lamb of God’] About a dozen traditions about lambs have been [referenced]... Several [expositors] take the... expression to be... [a] combination of 2 or more of these traditions.... [It’s likely] ‘the Lamb of God’... establishes a new concept on the basis of traditional concepts... The notion of the Suffering Servant (Is. 53) & the Passover Lamb, which are manifestly in the mind of the writer, seem to be the best proposals.... [We propose John’s] Lamb of God is composed of these 2 traditions.” [Jesper T. Nielson, “*Lamb of God*,” in J. Frey (ed.) *Imagery in the Gospel of John*, pp. 225-7]

3. The Lamb of God + the Passover motif in John’s Gospel (2:13; 6:4; 11:55; 19:36 ‘*Not one of his bones... broken*’)

- “The identification of Jesus as the Passover lamb... who takes away the sin of the world, introduces a primarily ... Johannine... title that is developed throughout the entirety of John’s Gospel & beyond... The Passover tradition is a dominant motif in John’s Gospel, & with it the theme of Jesus as the Passover lamb who accomplishes for his followers what the [Exodus] lamb represented in the life & liberation of ancient Israel... Scholars... debate... the meaning of John the Baptist’s words regarding Jesus being the Lamb of God [1:29]. For most interpreters ... mention of the Lamb of God in this context includes at least some reference to the Passover....

This early episode [Jn. 1:29] serves as an introduction...of Jesus as the Passover Lamb...a theme that is continued through -out the book...Jesus is most clearly & expansively described as the Passover Lamb in John's Gospel ...The narrative backbone or frame of John's Gospel is Jesus as the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world...At the outset of Jesus' ministry, he is revealed & proclaimed as the sacrificial Lamb of God (1:29, 36)...a Christological title that's developed throughout the Gospel." (S. Porter, B. Dyer, *Origins of NT Christology*, pp.)

4. Takes away – clear link to sacrificial system – present tense signifies the ongoing sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice and the fact that it is available at all times for every sinner who will trust in him
 - "If sin is the unbelief that separates people from God, then the Lamb of God removes sin by removing unbelief. In Johannine theology, sin is taken away when faith is evoked. Sin is the opposite of faith, & both are relational notions. If sin is a deadly alienation from God, then faith is a life-giving relationship with God. The death of Christ takes sin away when it creates faith in the face of For this to occur, the death of Christ must call forth human faith in God by conveying God's love to humankind." (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 114)
5. The sin of the world
 - "Sin, in John's Gospel, is a problem in one's relationship with God...[It] encompasses both unbelief and the actions that proceed from it. The sin of the world is fundamentally the world's alienation from God & the one whom God sent." (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 113)
 - "...in a very basic sense, Jesus' death is the product of human sin. The Lamb suffers the consequences of sin because he is put to death by those who do not believe. Yet the paradox is that Jesus' death is not only the result of human sin, it is God's means of overcoming sin." (Craig Koester, *Words of Life*, p. 114)
 - "John's Gospel does not focus on the legal penalty for sin...the need for divine justice but on the need for human faith...When Jesus tells his opponents that they will die in their sins, he adds that they will die in their sins unless they 'believe' (8:24)." (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 115)
6. The world
 - "The 'world' in John's Gospel is not characterized by radiant sunsets & gentle breezes, by the colors of spring flowers or the golden hues of fall – it requires no sacrifice to love a world like that. But in John's Gospel God loves the world that hates him; he gives his Son for the world that rejects him. He offers his love to a world estranged from him in order to overcome its hostility & bring the world back into relationship with its Maker." (Craig Koester, *Word of Life*, p. 114)

IV. The Domino Effect (Jn. 1:35-51)

"The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, **36** and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" **37** The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. **38** Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" **39** He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. **40** One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. **41** He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). **42** He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **45** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses

in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." **46** Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." **47** Jesus saw

Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" **48** Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." **49** Nathanael answered

him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" **50** Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." **51** And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (Jn. 1:35-51)