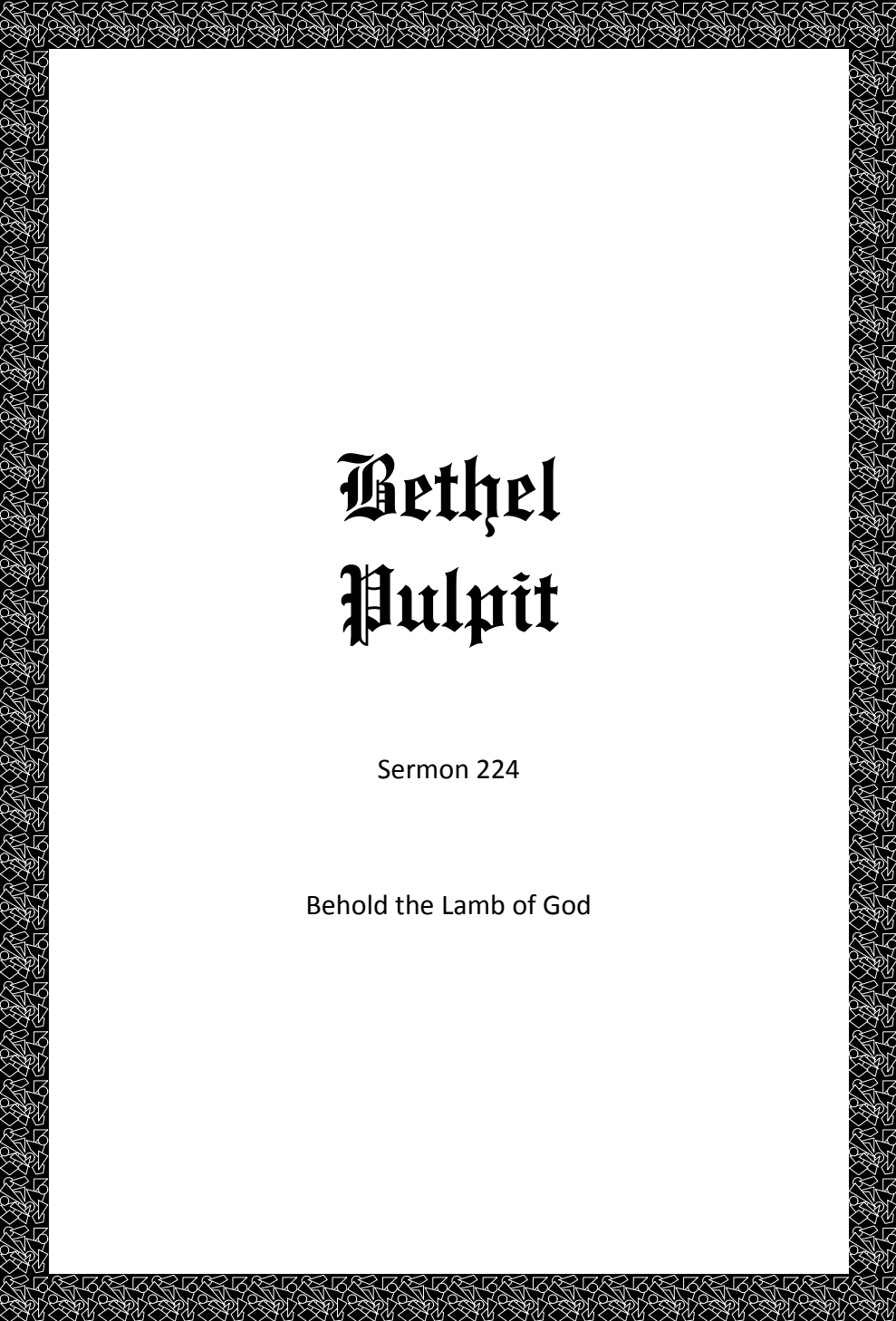




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 224

Behold the Lamb of God

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 22nd February, 2004**

Text: *"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"*
(John 1. 29).

This must have been a most sacred occasion. John the Baptist was there baptizing. His ministry was being blessed. Many were coming to him; many were being baptized. And then on this day as he was preaching there was a Stranger appeared in the crowd, unknown to the people, a glorious Stranger, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. John pointed to Him and cried, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." And those who were listening to John knew what he meant! This title, *the Lamb*, is part of the gospel vocabulary, and under the Old Testament there were a lot of these words like sacrifice, blood, priest, the lamb, and they were all a preparation for the coming of the Saviour. These who listened to John the Baptist knew well what it meant. "The Lamb." They expected the coming of the Saviour. They expected the coming of the Messiah. But John clearly tells us that this glorious Person, the Son of God, the One who has come into this world, has come as the Lamb of God and He has come with one purpose, and that is that He might "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Now beloved friends, it is a most beautiful expression, a most beautiful title of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Incidentally, in passing, there are more names and titles given to the Lord Jesus in this chapter than any other chapter in the Word of God. As you go through it – the Word, and then the Light, and you can go on – there must be a dozen or more different names and offices and titles given to the Lord Jesus, and they are all precious, and they are all so attractive. O but this: "the Lamb of God." I hope some of you children, you girls and boys and you young people, might see a beauty in this title: "the Lamb of God."

Well of course, it speaks of the Lord Jesus in His spotless purity, "the Lamb of God." It speaks of the Lord Jesus in His meekness and gentleness, "the Lamb of God." But especially it speaks of the Lord Jesus as the appointed sacrifice for the sins of His people. That is what it meant to those who were listening to John the Baptist. Every Israelite was well instructed in what the lamb was and the value of the lamb. Well, day by

day they saw the sacrifice with blood. They knew that the lamb was slain each day at Jerusalem. They knew the reason: because God had said, “Without shedding of blood is no remission.” They knew it must be “a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Some of them perhaps were bewildered by it. Some perhaps saw no further than the rite, the ceremony, but every one of them knew what the lamb meant.

They could look back to the time when Israel came out of Egypt, the passover lamb, the destroying angel passing through the land of Egypt, death to each house, death to the firstborn, Israel no different, no better by nature than Egypt, but the houses of the Israelites passed by. Why? Well, they saw the lamb. Every Israelite knew of the lamb. It was the one thing needful. It was so precious on the passover night. The lamb without blemish was slain instead of the Israelite. There was death in every house – the Egyptians, the Israelites. It was either the firstborn or it was the lamb instead of the firstborn, in the place of the firstborn – substitution. It was well understood by the Israelites. The lamb slain, and then the blood shed, and the blood had to be applied to the doors of the house where they were. It spoke of a personal interest in it, and those who were sheltering in a house where the blood was, were completely safe. Where the blood was applied, there was life. Where there was no blood, there was death. So the value of the lamb, the value of the blood, a refuge, a hiding place from God’s anger against sin. “The blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.”

O these hearers of John the Baptist knew well what the lamb meant. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” They could look back even before the passover, the first martyr, Abel, and he was well taught that lesson that the only way of approach to a holy God must be through the lamb slain, through blood shed. How much Abel knew we are not told, but we know that, because it was “by faith,” he had a view of Christ the Lamb of God. The Word of God tells us it was an “excellent sacrifice.” What was wrong with Cain’s offering, the fruit of the field? It was really what *he* had done, what *he* had accomplished. But above all, it was not according to the law of God. It was a bloodless sacrifice, a bloodless offering. And there is so much of this bloodless sacrifice, bloodless offering, bloodless religion today.

I think I am right in saying this. It was before the last war, and there were plans that that beautiful hymn, “There is a fountain filled with blood,” should be excluded from the Methodist Hymn Book. Dr. Dinsdale T. Young, in the leading Methodist pulpit in Westminster, opened the service with, “There is a fountain filled with blood,” and said, “Whatever our denomination says about it, we will start the service with it today, and next week, and the one after.” No salvation without the blood, without the Lamb. Abel’s offering was accepted; the bloodless sacrifice was rejected. And there always has been the enmity of the world against the people of God, and there always has been the enmity of professed religion against those who preach the atonement. So Cain slew his brother Abel, who went as the first martyr to heaven.

Those Israelites who heard John the Baptist say, “Behold the Lamb of God,” knew all about Mount Moriah, and, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad.” They knew how Isaac was about to be sacrificed and at the last moment God stayed His hand, and there Isaac was freed from the altar, and the lamb that had been caught with its horns in the thicket was slain on the altar – the sacrifice, the lamb slain instead of Isaac; the lamb dies and Isaac is set free. These things were burnt into the hearts of Israel down the ages.

And then the whole of the ceremonial law, those lambs that had to be sacrificed, the blood that had to be shed, no salvation, no remission without blood. And so this went on century after century, and every Israelite knew it, but in reality they knew one other thing: that all those lambs that were slain and all that blood that was shed could never really, truly, actually put away sin. The faithful in Israel longed for an answer. They knew this was not the end. They knew Messiah was to come. They saw it through the types and shadows. They saw it through a glass darkly. But now at length this glorious truth, “Behold the Lamb of God” – not just one of these Jewish lambs, not just one of these Israelites’ lambs. This is the Lamb of God, the Lamb appointed by God, the Lamb provided by God, the Lamb who is God’s dear, eternal Son, the Lamb who becomes a real Man that He might suffer, bleed and die.

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” All these listening Israelites knew of the lamb which in type took away the sin of a Jew, the sin of an Israelite, but, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin *of the world*” – Gentiles and Jews alike.

Now it is a most beautiful word, isn't it? I have felt if only I could rightly speak to you about the glories and beauties of the dear Lamb of God. But we have to prove, "Living tongues are dumb at best; we must die to speak of Christ." But if only the text remains with you and if only you are enabled to *obey* the text.

"Lamb of God for sinners wounded!

Sacrificed to cancel guilt!

None shall ever be confounded

Who on Thee their hopes have built."

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." I thought if only the Lord today would use the text, and I could not help thinking of Spurgeon. I know we do not agree with some things in Spurgeon, but there was that famous occasion when, having to preach in the Crystal Palace to over twenty thousand people, he feared the people would not hear his voice. So a day or two before this great, national service in the Crystal Palace he went along and the platform was erected, and the whole, vast place was completely empty. He went up on the rostrum and thought he would try his voice out and see if it was possible to make himself heard. He repeated this word, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Unbeknown to him, in one of the galleries was a workman who knew nothing of what was being done. He heard this voice as if it were coming from heaven: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," and the Lord sealed it right home to his heart. There was no exposition, no comment, no sermon. We do not know whether anything was accomplished when the crowd gathered. But just one simple text of Scripture preached in power by the Holy Ghost in a sinner's heart. Well, may it be something like that.

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." I think if you have a margin to your Bible you will find it renders this word "taketh away," as *beareth away*. That is the only way that sin could ever be taken away, if the Lamb of God should bear it away, which He did when that solemn word was fulfilled at the cross: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." The Lord laid all the sins of all His people upon Christ and Christ bore them "with strength enough, and none to spare." And the dear Lamb of God as He bore those sins, He bore all the wrath of God that those sinners deserved, and,

“Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,
And then again at mine.”

Divine wrath fell on the Lamb of God and He bore it, and He bore it away that it might never fall on the sinner who shelters in Him. O that taking away of all the sin of all the people of God!

So this is a very beautiful word, a very beautiful text. But it has to do with a dreadful, evil, ugly thing, and that is sin. We will not really be interested in the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world unless we are brought to feel that we want the Lamb of God to take away *our* sin, to take away your sin, my sin. Well, have you any sins you want the Lamb of God to take away? One thing is clear: we cannot take away our own sin. Our confession does not take away our sins. Our repentance does not take away our sins. If we cry many tears, it does not take away our sins. It is only the Lamb of God who can take away sin. But you say, “Well, I don’t think I am much of a sinner.” To take you on your own ground, if you die and you have one sin, only one sin, and it has not been taken away, then hell will be your eternal portion. So great is the justice of God, so great is the holiness of God, so great is the purity of God, that *one sin* untaken away cannot appear in the presence of God in heaven. Heaven is that holy, holy, holy place where sin can never, never, never enter. But the mystery of it: all these ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands who are in heaven, every single one of them by nature and practice sinners, and yet they are in that place where sin can never enter. Then you see it here: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” so that that multitude that no man can number can enter into heaven.

I do not want you to think when it says the Lord Jesus took away the sin of the world that it means everybody. It means all sorts of people. It means people throughout the world. It means Jews as well as Gentiles. But it is very, very clear that some people have never had their sins taken away, and some have never wanted them taken away, and some have never been concerned about taking them away, and some of them have never felt they have any sins to be taken away. In former days under the preaching of the gospel our chapels seemed to be filled with hearers who had the most awful consciousness of the vileness of their sin, yet they were good, upright, moral people outwardly. But they had such views of the holy, righteous, spotless character of God, and such views of the demands of His

holy law which demands perfection and nothing short in thought and word and deed. So they not only believed because it was in Scripture, but they felt in the sight of a holy, heart-searching God that they were sinners, and the great thing was if only they might find their sins for ever put away. Well, this beautiful word has relationship to that awful fact that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” None can do anything to put away their own sin.

“Not the labour of my hands,
Can fulfil Thy laws demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.”

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Well, it was at Calvary that the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ took away the sin of the world – that is, the world of God’s people among Gentiles as well as Jews. I know some people preach a kind of general redemption that Jesus died for everybody and then it is up to you whether you accept it or not. Now what kind of salvation is that? If sin was put away on the cross, then it can no more be charged to my account. What kind of salvation is that which puts away the sin of Cain as well as Abel, Saul as well as David, Judas Iscariot as well as Peter? O to have a salvation that saves and an atonement that atones and a redemption that redeems! “Here we have a sure foundation; here’s a refuge for the lost.” But an indefinite atonement, a general atonement is no solid foundation; it is sinking sand.

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” I do not want any of you just to think of this merely as a kind of legal transaction. It was; it was a covenant transaction between the Father and the Son made in eternity, that on condition of the Son of God obeying the law and bearing its curse the elect would be saved with an everlasting salvation. So there was a legal agreement; there was a covenant. But I want you to see the love of the Saviour in it. “Was ever love like this?” “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” The love of the dear Lamb of God in going to the cross to suffer, bleed and die.

“It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly;
But love to sinners fills His heart,
And makes Him choose to die.”

He said, “No man taketh [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” This willingness of the dear Lamb of God to die! When they came to arrest Him in the garden, and He said, “I am He,” they fell back helpless. He said, “If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way.” The willingness of the Lamb of God to die, the love of the Lamb of God to sinners. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” I want you to see the love in it.

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” I want you always to remember just how much He suffered. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger.” Now is it nothing to you? Hear the dear Lamb of God from the cross: “Is it nothing to you?” I believe that cuts our congregation in two this morning. There are some of you – “Is it nothing to you?” – you say, “It means everything to me.” I say this in much affection. Sadly I believe there are still some of you and it means nothing to you whether the Saviour died or whether He did not die. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Behold His dying love and behold the sufferings He endured, because as He bore His people’s sins He bore their sorrows. “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” It is precious blood, and only precious blood, that can take away sin. So the apostle is very bold. He says, “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” When the Lord Jesus, the dear Lamb of God died, when He shed His precious blood, when He cried with a loud voice, “It is finished,” then all the sins of all His

people were for ever put away, for ever taken away. “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.” “In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none.” “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Well, you have the lamb in type and then the Lamb preached by John the Baptist, and then the Lamb slain, the one sacrifice at Calvary, and there at the cross you have the sins of all God’s people for ever put away. But beloved friends, the great point is you and me personally. We see the dear Lamb of God dying for sinners on the cross. We see their sins for ever put away. But we want *our* sins to be forgiven. We want *our* sins personally to be atoned for, *our* sins personally to be put away. This is it: “Behold the Lamb of God.” As the Holy Spirit shows you that you have sins which need to be put away and the solemnity of those sins which need to be put away and your accountability for those sins which need to be put away, then He brings you to “behold the Lamb of God.” When John said it, I imagine all the people turned and looked. But with you and me it is by faith, faith which brings eternal realities near, faith which brings distant things near, faith which takes us to that hill outside the city wall at Jerusalem, faith which brings us to see the dear Lamb of God suffering, bleeding, dying upon the cross, shedding His precious blood, faith which enables us to look to Him, to “behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” and which says, “Dear Lamb of God, take away mine. Take away my sins.”

O it is that look of complete dependence. It is that look of sorrow. It is that look of confession. It is that look of repentance. It is that look renouncing any hope in self or anything I can do. It is that look of hope. “None but Jesus.” This is my only hope. This is the way to heaven. Here I see my pardon; here I see my forgiveness. And there at the cross you feel the awfulness of sin and you feel as you never felt it before that you have a sweet hope it is for ever put away. Can you remember what we sang at the Lord’s table at the beginning of this month?

“Then beneath the cross adoring,
Sin does like itself appear;
When, the wounds of Christ exploring,
I can read my pardon there.”

It is solemn, sacred language, but may a few of you this morning by faith read your pardon there.

Other hope, other refuge we have none; no other way of salvation; no other way to heaven. O but the glory of the gospel, salvation for the chief of sinners brought by the Holy Spirit's teaching to "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," and to rest your hope, your only hope there.

"Lamb of God for sinners wounded!
Sacrificed to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded
Who on Thee their hopes have built."

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

(If the Lord will, the evening sermon on the same text will be published next month.)

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Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.

My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.

My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear,
When hanging on the accursed tree,
And hopes her guilt was there.

Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove;

We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And sing His bleeding love.

I. Watts