

Behold the Lamb of God

by: Ronald L. Dart

Why do you suppose God leaves us with so many unanswered questions? And why are some of the truths of the Bible so, well, obscure? If God wants us to know something, why doesn't He come right out and say so?

I talked about this in a recent 'Born to Win' radio program because a woman asked me about it, and I think in a little bit of frustration.

The fact is, that on the really important things, God does come right out and say so, but there's a whole lot more to be known and God has placed in the heart of man the desire to know everything. We are not just content with a little bit of knowledge. We want to know the whys and the wherefores and we get those answers, and we still have more questions. Everything of course, is a little more than our small brains can hold, but there is a lot more that we can know.

Testimonies Of Witnesses

As Paul said, "Now we know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9). We call the Bible the 'Word of God,' and indeed it is, but that word comes to us in the form of the testimony of a cloud of witnesses. And just as a good investigator can take the testimony of one witness, combine it with the testimony of another witness, he can then come to know something that actually isn't in the testimony of either one of them, and it is only by knowing what both of them said, that you can discern what really happened.

So we can sometimes find insights into things that are not actually said by any of the witnesses in the Bible, we do it by taking a little bit here and a little bit there and we say, "Wait a minute, why did he say that?" It is like a great puzzle of life where we struggle to put together all the pieces and discover pictures previously unknown and unseen.

God Reveals And Conceals

Sometimes we have to be led to these things by God Himself, opening our mind to see these things. After one particularly opaque parable of Jesus, His disciples came to him privately, probably feeling a little dumb, and asked Him, "Lord, what did that parable mean?" And Jesus answered them, you find this in Mark chapter 4 and verse 11, He said, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to them that are without, all these things are done in parables, { 12 } That seeing they may see, and not perceive, hearing they

may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted and their sins should be forgiven them."

Now that is a troubling statement, "that it is not given to people to understand, lest they should repent, be converted and their sins be forgiven them." But you know, it's better to be troubled by some of these questions than simply dismiss them out of hand.

Some people are allowed to understand some things and others are not. What do you suppose makes the difference between these two categories of people? It may have something to do with how we treat the things that are plainly stated. Think about that. There is a whole bunch of things in the Bible that is clear as crystal.

I mean, what is there about "Thou shalt not steal" that you and I don't understand? It is clear. If it belongs to you, it belongs to you and I have no right to take away from you, so that we understand.

Now here's the next question. Why should God reveal the hidden things to a thief? Or to an adulterer? To a liar? To a covetous person? What good is there in opening a mind to see things that he wouldn't do if he did see them? Not only is there no good in it, there may be positive harm in it.

Dig Here

Now this may not be the whole answer to this, but it is a start. For the person who cares to look, there is an incredible wealth of knowledge in the Bible. I have over the years learned that whenever I see an anomaly in the Bible, it is a red flag stuck in the ground. It says, "Dig here!" I have found that if I go and get my shovel, and go to the trouble to dig around that red flag I find stuff there.

Take for example, an incident recorded only by the apostle John. No one else mentions this at all. John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan River by a little place called Bethabara, which is a Hebrew word that means 'the ferry house' (John 1:28). John looked up and saw Jesus walking toward him and he said something that, whenever I read this I wonder what on earth the people he was baptizing, and his disciples who were there, what did they think He meant?

Behold, The Lamb Of God

John saw Jesus walking on the bank of the Jordan River and he said, {29} "Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world."

Now for the 21st. century Christian that has been so bandied about in sermon and song, we know exactly what he was talking about, but I don't think it was that clear at all to the disciples of John at that time. John in a sense was baptizing unto repentance (Matthew 3:1-12). and the idea of washing away one sins in baptism was well enough known. He was not

the only person who baptized, baptism or immersion, in water was common in Judaism at that time.

The people also knew well enough, what a sacrificial lamb was. The ceremonial rites at the Temple made provision for offering a lamb, even a kid of the goats, for a sin offering, so they got that. They were completely aware of the Passover lamb, which served for a family and memorialized the Passover night in Egypt, where all the firstborn, not protected by the blood of the lamb died.

We all know that because we learned it in Sunday school or Sabbath school or we've heard it in sermons or we have sung it in songs. But there was nothing in the understanding of the Jews or the culture of the Jews standing about John, of a man serving as a lamb for a sin offering, nor was there anything in their purview about, saving the world, as strange as it may sound to us, salvation to them was of and for and by the Jews.

It was purely a matter of their faith, their religion, their God, and my God is not your God. It was the way their culture had brought them up to believe.

So I can't help wondering what the people thought when John said this. John's testimony is right here, but it's incomplete. There is information that John may have had, his disciples didn't have, but by the time Paul wrote some of his letters, a lot had cleared up this mystery.

The Apostle Paul Writes To The Church At Corinth

For example, there came a day when Paul had to write to the Church at Corinth. He had gotten some information about things that was going on there. We can all be grateful for the failures of the Corinthian Church, because it was the failures of this rather obstreperous bunch of people, that caused Paul, it forced him, to write this first letter, in which, a great deal of valuable information is found to connect just even for one example, to what John said that day while he was baptizing.

There was a man in the Corinthian Church, who was committing a particularly egregious sin, commonly known, not even hiding the things that he was doing, and the church had not even lifted a finger to do anything about it (1 Corinthians 5). The Days of Unleavened Bread were approaching, they had all gotten leavening out of their homes. So their homes were free of leaven, but their church was not.

So Paul wrote them and told them (1 Corinthians 5), "You had better deal with this situation. I've judged it already. You all get together, my spirit will be present with you, and my authority with you, and you deliver this guy to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so we can save his soul in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Now I don't know what 'delivering a person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh' means. I just know that I don't want it to happen to me.

Christ Our Passover Is Sacrificed For Us

Paul went on to say, drawing his analogy out a little further, in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 7, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened."

Now Paul had already compared this chap to leaven in bread as to a corrupting influence, as it were. You will find all of this in first Corinthians chapter 5, so Paul says, "Let's get this man out of the church, so you can be a new lump, a really unleavened lump, even as you are unleavened in your homes. {7} For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, {8} Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Now John didn't say this on the bank of the Jordan River that day. He said, "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world."

Paul takes us a step further and identifies "Jesus Christ as our Passover lamb, who is sacrificed for us."

A Thread

So there is a thread that runs from John the Baptist's remark to Paul's statement and now we realize that John the Baptist knew what Jesus was to do and why He was to do it, and there is more significance now in John's remark, "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world."

I take from this combination that the Passover lamb is for everyone, not just for the Jews. But I noticed something else about this thread. It continues on from these statements and it may be worth following it to see where it leads.

Nicodemus

If we follow that thread forward from the statement of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," we come to the third chapter of John and we encounter, if you are a churchgoer very often at all, you have heard about this man.

"He was a Pharisee," John 3 verse 1, "He was one of the rulers of the Jews presumably a member of the Sanhedrin. His name was Nicodemus. {2} He came to Jesus, and for some reason by night and he said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God because no man can do these miracles that you do except God be with him.""

This is an incredible admission coming from a member of the Sanhedrin and who included others, I'm sure of in his comment, because he said "We know." What he was hoping was

that that's all Jesus was, that Jesus was a teacher, or at least fearing that He might be more. The fact is this man seems to, later on, come around completely.

But Jesus hit him with this statement, which is familiar to most Christians. He said, {3} "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus didn't get it. He said, {4} "How is it possible for man to be born when he is my age? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

Well Jesus came along with some other things to explain this to him, and Nicodemus still didn't get it, and finally Jesus said in verse 10, "Are you a master in Israel and you don't know these things? {11} "I'll tell you the truth, We speak what we know, we testify what we have seen, and you don't seem to receive the witness. {12} I've told you earthly things and you don't believe, how are you going to believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

Isn't that an interesting remark all by itself?

Jesus said, "I've told you the basics. I've given you plain straight statements and you don't believe, then how on earth are you going to believe if I take you on to the heavenly things."

How is it that so many things in the Bible are obscure, that we just don't seem to get, whereas some things are quite clear. Well, basically, if you can't believe the things that are clear, why take us beyond that?

And so Jesus said in verse 13, "No man has ascended up into heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man, which is in heaven."

This verse is clear! Do you believe it?

For God So Loved The World

Then Jesus proceeds to make a truly remarkable statement, in John 3 verse 14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. {15} That whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. {16} For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.""

That last verse, John 3:16, I think is the first Scripture a lot of us ever memorized. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. {17} For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world," that's not the point. "But that the world through him might be saved."

What did John the Baptist say, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." And then later John says, he actually quotes Jesus as saying, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever, whoever believes in him, should not perish but have everlasting life."

Following The Thread

It's the gospel in a nutshell, but there is still the thread we are following, and it doesn't just run from John the Baptist to Paul through this Scripture. If we go back and follow it back into history, we find something else because this expression, "He gave his only begotten son," touches a chord of memory.

Abraham

There was a man once, who was called on to do this very thing. His name was Abraham. He was a friend of God. God had called him from the land of Ur of the Chaldeans and brought him all the way to the promised land and promised he would give him everything from the Nile River to the Euphrates, to his seed, and his descendants who would be like the sand of the seashore.

Now this man was called a "friend of God" (James 2:23). God loved him, and yet there came a day, when God decided He needed to try Abraham and He said to him, "Abraham, take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains that I will tell you of." You will find this in the 22nd chapter of Genesis.

Now the story that lies behind this is fascinating because Abraham and Sarah were very old and even though God had made promises like this to him, Abraham and Sarah had no child, and finally Sarah decided to take matters into her own hands, so to speak, and she tells Abraham, "Look, here's my maid Hagar. You take Hagar and let's beget a child by her and the child will be mine. It was a surrogate motherhood and they did it in those days the natural way instead of the way they do it today in a test tube. Well, it turned out to be a very bad idea.

The boy that was born of Hagar, his name was Ishmael, turned out to be a really big problem and Abraham had to send him away, but this was not part of what God's promise was. God's promise was that "The two of you, Abraham and Sarah, will have a son." Well, they had a son and named him Isaac, and he was the son of Abraham's old age. and he loved him like his own life. And now, he is supposed to take him to a mountain and offer him for a burnt offering?

Well, Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his animal and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son. He split the wood for the burnt offering and loaded it up on the animal and they all rose up and went to the place that God had told him of. It was a three-day journey and when they got there, Abraham put the wood over his shoulder, something to start the fire with, and the knife along with him, and he told the young men to wait there while he took Isaac up the hillside.

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, {7} "My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" {8} Abraham said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

And they went on, both of them together and they came to the place that God had told him of and he built an altar. He laid the wood in order. He bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar upon the wood. He took his hand, picked up the knife to slay his son.

My word, Christians write songs about this, "God will provide himself a lamb." They see all the way back, down this thread that we have been following to Abraham and Isaac, as a type of God loving the world so much that he gave His only begotten son, and now in Abraham, we are able to see, the pain that a father must feel, the loss that the father is facing, when he makes the decision to give his own son in death.

It's a shocking thing to even think about, sobering beyond belief, but we have come across it in this truth. We followed a thread that winds its way through history and at every place along that thread where we pick it up, we find it's about Jesus Christ. All the way back to Abraham, and probably, if we had the wit to see it, it even goes back further than that.

So, we learn, because we have looked, because we saw that anomaly and we said, "Where is this story going to lead?" Well, as Abraham was ready the angel called him out of heaven and said, {11} "Abraham." Abraham said, "I am here". The angel said, "Don't lay your hand upon the lad and don't do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me."

Abraham did not actually have to do the deed. God would never approve of human sacrifice, and so, Abraham looked and there was a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. He took him, and offered that ram for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

Following The Thread Again

On our way back to this point, there was another place on the same thread that we passed over and didn't look at.

In following this thread back to Abraham, we passed one of the most important events in the history of the world for that matter, but certainly in the history of Israel.

The Passover In Egypt

One of the most important events in the history of Israel was the Passover in Egypt, when God sent Moses and Aaron down to Pharaoh and put all of Egypt through that terrible line of ten plagues that they went through and finally came to the last one, with Pharaoh's heart having been hardened, in refusing to let the Israelites go.

It finally comes to the place where God speaks to Moses and Aaron and says in Exodus 12 verse 2, "Okay, this month shall be to you the beginning of months. {3} Speak to the congregation of Israel and say, "On the tenth day of this month," and one wonders if it was the tenth day of the moon when Abraham was sent to the mountain with Isaac, "they shall take to them every man a lamb according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house, {5} So you take this lamb without blemish, a male of the first year, you take it out of the sheep or the goats. {6} You keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening."

And apparently, this fourteenth day of the first month was the very time when Jesus Christ was slain.

{7} "And they took this lamb and they killed it and they took some of his blood and they struck it on the two side posts and the lintel of their houses where they were going to eat it, and God said {13} "When I see the blood, on your houses, I will pass over you."

What an astonishing thing to consider. Here was a lamb, that they were going to use to protect and to save the firstborn of an entire nation and deliver that entire nation out of bondage in which they had been held all of their lives, the lives of their fathers, the lives of their grandfathers, down through generations of time.

The Thread That We Are Following Is All About Christ

This thread makes its way from the beginning, all the way down to the end, and it is all about Christ. There is a theme that runs all along this thread that we almost have to take note of, if we care enough to dig.

For example, we start with Paul in his statement, 1 Corinthians 5: 7 and 8, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." Now we pick up this little thread and we follow it back to John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him." And I take that quite literally. He means everybody in the whole wide world. We follow the thread a little further and we come to John the Baptist standing on the banks of the Jordan River and looking up and seeing Jesus walking toward him, and says, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

It reaches out to everyone. We follow the thread further back and we find Moses in Egypt and once again when we pick up the thread, there is Christ our Passover sacrificed for us.

Christians have seen that down through the generations when they sing a song like, "When I see the blood, I will pass, I will pass over you."

And we follow the thread all the way back to Abraham and Isaac on the top of the mountain with Abraham having a knife in his hand, ready to kill his own son as a type of Christ (Genesis 22:11).

I am still left with a mystery, "Why doesn't everyone see this?" Could it be because they are not willing to do the simple things."

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