

<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” <sup>32</sup>And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup>I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>34</sup>And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.” <sup>35</sup>The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

<sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” <sup>39</sup>He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. <sup>40</sup>One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). <sup>42</sup>He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Some stains just don’t come out. I spilled salad oil on my favorite sweatshirt. Even after pouring Lestoil on the stain, washing it, using other stain removers, washing it again, washing that sweatshirt I don’t know how many times, the darker circle remained. I gave up – wore the sweatshirt around the house. Finally threw it away. Some stains just don’t come out.

Some sins are like that, too. They leave a stain, a dark spot in the heart. Hearing I am forgiven may wash away the normal stains, but the stain of some sins in our hearts and minds is much tougher.

You and I are not always the best people we could be. Sometimes we are weary and lose patience with those we love. Something happens. A child is injured. A wife leaves.

Sometimes we take what looks to be the easy way out of a dilemma. Not standing up for a colleague who needs a friend, going against our conscience, just letting the kids get away with it one more time.

Sometimes so much is lost to addictions. The best years of a life - health – self-respect – the respect of others.

Some sins leave stains that are not so easily removed.

The God of Israel wanted a people whose hearts were unstained. The priests could sacrifice a bull or a calf or a goat or a ram or a lamb at certain times, in certain circumstances as a sin offering. God wanted the people to know their sins were forgiven. In a public and visible way God wanted the people to show their sorrow so that the people might know God's mercy. I think of these sacrifices as a way that God was washing out the stains – not up in heaven in God's heart but in the hearts of God's people. For if God forgives you and the stain in your heart remains – for you it is as if there has been no forgiveness at all.

The Lord provided another ceremony to convince the people that God did not hold on to their sins. Once a year a goat was chosen and the priest put both of his hands on the head of the goat and confessed over it all the sins, all the rebellious acts, and all of the things the Israelites had done wrong. All of the sins were transferred to the goat's head. And then the goat was released in the desert. The goat was appointed to take all the sins out into the desert and there they remained. Not with the people, not staining the hearts of the people, but on that goat that has come to be called the scapegoat.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! John the Baptist presented Jesus in this way.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The Lamb of God.

Picture the almighty God, creator of all, protector of all, ruler over all, cradling a lamb in God's arms - a most precious lamb that God loves with all of God's heart. Hear the ancient song of Israel, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." Know that this song is sung most of all by this Lamb of God, God's own Son.

Now see the Almighty God, the Father of Jesus, place two hands on Jesus' head, and confess sins. All the sins for all time, all the sins in all the world, confessed as these hands rest on Jesus' head.

Then see the Father who loves the Son with an eternal love send the Son into the wilderness of death that he might carry all the sins of the world into that desert called death and leave them there.

This most beloved Son, this precious lamb sent to the cross and into death for you.

All this God has done so that no stain could remain in your heart.

Have you sinned? The Lord has already confessed your sin with two hands laid on Jesus' head. The Lamb of God has taken away your sin - even the sin of the whole world.

Believe.

Jesus did not suffer for God's sake – but for your sake. Jesus releases you from the chains of your sin, from the past that would drag you down and take joy from your heart. Jesus took all your sin upon himself – you sin is yours no longer.

Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now you are the precious one in the arms of the Almighty God - a lamb pure, innocent. Now you can sing the song God wrote for Jesus – “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his names sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

