

Atonement Riches - Christ, The Sacrifice

John 1:19-36 (v.29 & 36)

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Christ the Victor.
Christ our Ransom.
Christ our Substitute.

Three images presented in Scripture to help us understand the riches of salvation, won for us by Jesus through his **Atonement**.

This week we will see Jesus the Saviour through the eyes of John the Baptist.
John is the one who comes to announce God's great salvation to Israel.
He does so in a way that was, for centuries, depicted in any portrait of John.

John would be shown in some declaring posture. And somewhere, always, was a Lamb. Often bleeding. Sometimes the blood pouring into a chalice.

John proclaims Jesus as the Passover Lamb.

That Lamb goes right back to the very beginning of the history of God's people.
Back to their time of deadly slavery.

In Egypt - when there was no possibility of life, no hope, no future for them.

And God breaks into their slavery because of his great love for them.
He cannot, in his love, allow them to remain in that enslaved state.
He sets them free.

It is a deadly slavery. And requires a deadly solution.

The angel of death is dispatched. Sent to claim the life of all first-born in Egypt, human and animal alike.

Why first-born?

Because, somehow they are representative of all future life, all generations to come.

You know the story - the lamb without blemish is found, its blood drained and smeared on the doorposts and lintel of the Hebrew homes.

And the angel of death passes over those homes.

The blood of the Passover Lamb is substituted for the blood of the occupants of that home.

Humanity is caught in slavery.

A slavery where there is no possibility of life, no hope, no future for us.

It is deadly.

Eternally so.

And God breaks into our slavery because of his great love for us.

He cannot, in his love, allow us to remain in that enslaved state.

He sets us free.

It is a deadly slavery. And requires a deadly solution.

This time - the Son of God is dispatched.

Sent, willingly, to become the Holy and Eternal Passover Lamb.

So that eternal death would pass over all who smear the doorposts, the going out and the coming in, of their lives under his blood.

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)

Look, here is the Lamb of God! (John 1:36)

The apostle John builds his entire gospel around the Passover theme. Which is why, for example, in chapter 19:14 he tells the passion narrative in such a way that Jesus is crucified at **exactly the same time** as the Passover Lamb.

In *The Revelation*, John gives the great vision of the Lamb before the throne of God
(Rev 5:6-14 and 8:2-3).

The apostle Peter picks up on that theme, too.

1 Peter 1:18-19 declares:

You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.

The blood of Christ is the source of our eternal life.

Consider, therefore, the place of blood in the Bible.

At its core, blood represents life.

In Moses' farewell sermon to Israel he commands,

"...never eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat." (Deut 12.23)

Blood represents life.

And, as payment for a life, blood is the currency.

Life pays for life.

Hence the declaration of Leviticus 17:11

for the life of any creature is in its blood. I have given you the blood so you can make atonement for your sins. It is the blood, representing life, that brings you atonement.

Life and blood are the same.

In the Passover Lamb, it is the life of the lamb symbolized in the blood smeared over the door. The shed life of the pure lamb guarantees the life of all in that home.

In God's eternal scheme of salvation, the early Passover Lamb is but a prototype, a looking-forward-symbol, of the great Sacrifice Lamb -
the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Yes - the theme of the blood of Christ is absolutely central to the Christian faith.

Here's a **small** sample -

Jesus declared:

Matthew 26:28 - For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

And the apostles' writings bear witness:

Romans 3:25 For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us.
We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us.

Ephesians 1:7 - In [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

1 John 1:7 - the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin...

And then there is the book of Hebrews.

Not only does it portray Jesus as the Lamb.

But, well, do you know it?

What is the other great image in the book of *Hebrews*?

How else does it portray Jesus?

Answer: *As the GREAT HIGH PRIEST*

Not only is he the one who is offered as the sacrifice.

He is the one who **OFFERS** the sacrifice - he is priest and lamb together.

Hebrews 9:13-15:

*13 Under the old system, the blood of [animals] could cleanse people's bodies from ritual defilement.
14 Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our hearts from deeds that lead to death so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to*

God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.

15 That is why he is the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, so that all who are invited can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed....

It is the divine gift from the Triune God.

Listen again to Hebrews 9:14-15. And notice how there is Trinitarian agreement and working together in this great act of Passover Salvation:

*For by the power of the eternal Spirit,
Christ offered himself
to God
as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.*

Please do not think of it, as some have charged recently, as an angry Father demanding and sending his Son to be a child-sacrifice; that it is some sort of divine child abuse.

Always think about Christ as Lamb with the echo of St.Paul in your mind. He speaks in Galatians 2:20 about "*The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" There is a free will in Christ's sacrifice. Painful. Awful. No trifle. But done freely. And in love.

Full
Trinitarian
unity and love

Holy love for a sin-straying humanity.

It is not about an angry God who is satisfied by human sacrifice.

It is about divine self-sacrifice.

And in that, the wrath against sin is dealt with.

Justice is completed.

As N.T. Wright put it, "God came and took upon himself, in the person of his Son, the pain and shame, yes, the horror and darkness, yes and.... the condemnation which he must and did pronounce over that deadly disease we call sin."

(A sermon preached at Durham Cathedral, 5 April 2007)

All of which calls for a response.

That response is summarized in 1 Corinthians 5.

Paul is tearing a strip off the church for condoning sexual immorality.

You'd have thought he was writing to the church in Canada!

He demands that they clean up their act.

And then says this:

Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Do you hear that language?

Remember our Seder Supper?

What is the first activity for the children when we gather - before **anything else** may proceed, what has to happen?

Answer: all yeast must be found and thrown outside the home. For yeast represents sin, and the way that God-less living can so easily infiltrate every other area of our life.

Paul uses Passover language.

Christ is the Passover Lamb.

And, in response to the once-for-all sacrifice of that Holy Lamb, Paul calls for response.

Calling for us to live our lives as one long, glorious Passover celebration.
Without yeast. At all.
Pure.

So is not an uptight, prudish thing to call for us to fight against today's barrage of internet porn. Or to call for marital fidelity between man and woman. To call for abstinence outside of the bonds of marriage.
Because those kind of activities are destructive.

I met with someone this week who works as an addictions counselor with high ranking officials in National Defense. She told me, "Ken, you wouldn't believe how many lives and homes are being destroyed in this city because of sexual addictions. Once it gets hold of you, it drags you deeper and deeper in. It kills you, bit by bit."

As believers in Jesus, purified by his blood, we don't want to get caught up with **anything** that tears at or destroys the holy and wonderfully good life that God is creating in us.

We want to live as participants in a life-long yeast-free Passover.

And that's why we live with purity and honour towards the human body.

And, as Paul continues in his gospel, that's why we seek to honour the Body of Christ recognized in the corporate gathering of believers.

And that's why in social gatherings, we're not out to cause an uproar, but to bring dignity and honour to the Lord.

And that's why we take the spiritual gifts granted to us, and we are sure to use them - honoring the different gifts that other believers have.

And that's why we seek to honour the Spirit's presence with order and decency.

And why we share our resources of wealth equitably.

Why?

So that, with pure and rightly-ordered lives we may reflect the eternal purity that is already now granted us through the blood of the Passover Lamb.

Thankfully.

Joyfully.

We strive to live life **already now** as it will be lived in the perfect purity and celebration of the New Creation.

Getting rid of sin-yeast, is not negative.

It is actually positive.

Restorative.

Healing.

And based in secure hope - the certain hope that our eternal life is guaranteed in Jesus.

And because of that - we strive to live eternally..... right now.

Doing so as our life of joyful, thankful response to Him who gave us life.

And who is our life.