



Sermon – November 28, 2021
Daniel Patterson

Verses Covered This Week

John 1:29 – 31

Revelation 1:7, 18

Revelation 3:20

Revelation 7:9

Revelation 21:3, 5

Revelation 22:7

Luke 1:31

Well good morning, Central family. Let me invite you to open your Bibles to John chapter 1, John chapter 1. We'll be in verses 29 through 31. I just wanted to say welcome. It's so great to see you all here. If you're new here, whether you're joining us in person and online, whether you're here for the holidays or whether you're here with family, I just want to say welcome. It's a great Sunday to be here with us, in part because it's the beginning of Advent. You can see all around we've got lights and candles and flowers and trees. And over the next 4 weeks, we're also going to be working through a new sermon series called Behold the Lamb of God. And we're going to be taking 4 important passages that show us something that we need to see about Jesus. And we're going to start right here this morning in John chapter 1 where John the Baptist is talking about Jesus as the Lamb of God.

You might be wondering, OK, Lamb of God, that doesn't have anything to do with the manger or Bethlehem or a baby and that's true. But in Advent, historically what we're talking about, what we're looking for and longing for is the coming of Jesus, both His first coming in a manger and His second coming in glory on the clouds. You see, we live in a time between two advents. And that's what we sang about this morning, wasn't it. Did you hear those songs? You think about, think about what they represented. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here. There's a longing and a yearning in that song because God has to ransom us; He has to rescue us. But what else did we sing? O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant. There's joy and there's celebration because a King has come and a King is coming again and we live in that space between those two advents, those two arrivals, those two invasions of Jesus in the creation here. We need both of these things and we see both of these things in this text right here in John 1. So let's read John chapter 1, verses 29 through 31. The Holy Spirit says to us:

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because He was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know Him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to Israel.”

This is God’s word for us today.

Now some of y’all know I’m new to Texas. And one of the things that I really appreciate about Texas and Texans so far is the way they talk. Y’all, y’all don’t have a reputation for being indirect or passive. Just come out and say what you think. And I love that. I appreciate that. That’s how I’m wired. It’s very liberating for me because I spent the first half of my childhood in North Mississippi, the rest of my childhood around Nashville, middle Tennessee. So English was not actually my native language. The first language that I learned was Mississippi. And that means sometimes words sound a little bit different. So I, for example, was born and lived for several years of my life in Corinth, Mississippi. You can always tell somebody from North Mississippi by the way they read the letters of the New Testament, and particularly, Paul’s letter to the church. Not Corinth. Paul’s letter to the church in “Cornth”. The heat sort of like evaporates all the vowels right out of the word. Or sometimes, you know, you learn these great expressions. You never say something simply if you can say it colorfully. You’re not just full; you’re full as a tick. You’re not just mad; you’re mad as a chicken with his head cut off. But also, there are all sorts of other things that you learn about speaking Mississippi. One of those things is you never say something direct if you can take a roundabout way to get there. Particularly when you’re, when you’re saying something that might be a little bit insulting or a little bit inviting. And there’s one particular phrase that’s sort of lord of them all. And I don’t know if it translates here to Texas, but it’s three little words, bless your heart. And that word can mean all sorts of things. You can mean it to express sympathy. Oh, y’all, Ms. Betty broke her hip. We need to pray for her, bless her heart. Or you can, it can be an affection. Oh, you look like a little princess, darling, bless your heart. But most often, it’s an insult kind of coated in kindness. So, oh, I see you have a giant tattoo of a clown on your neck, oh, bless your heart. What that means, I’ll translate that for you, is you have no taste and you’re not a very intelligent person but I’m too polite to say that. So, as an aside, I haven’t met most of y’all yet so if any of you have a clown tattoo on your neck, I’m going to be really embarrassed. So, I doubt that, but just in case. But the point here is these three little words, 13 letters, over the course of those three words, you can say a lot. And I couldn’t help but thinking, but think, about that when we’re looking at this text. When we’re looking at this verse. Because we’re going to zero in on one verse in particular here, John 1:29. When John the Baptist says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin!” Just a few words that say so much and have everything to do, not just with Advent, but also with your life. And when John the Baptist here describes Jesus as the Lamb of God, he’s showing us three vitally important things that we need to see as we live between these two Advents. And the first of those is that we look to the Lamb of God to deliver us from sin.

So let’s start at the very end of this verse and work our way backwards here this morning. We see this deliverance right here at the very end. Look at this language. Who takes away the sin of the world. So within this verse we should start by looking at the state of our own deliverance. And what I mean by that is this entire passage shows us how destitute we are in and of ourselves

as we think about why Jesus came to earth. We're confronted with the story of Israel right here in this passage, His covenant people. And if you look back across the pages of Scripture, what do we see about Israel? Their stubbornness, their sinfulness, there's a wilderness, there's wandering in the desert, there's idolatry over and over. And God rescues His people and they return to their sin. But notice what John is doing here in this text; the way John describes himself just a few verses before. Look up just a little bit in John 1:23. He's being questioned by the Pharisees. Are you the prophet? Are you Elijah? Are you the Messiah? And he's saying, "No." And what does he say about himself? "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord." Isn't it fitting that John refers to himself as one crying out from the wilderness, crying out from a desert wasteland? Because in so many ways, that describes exactly the desolate condition of God's people; crying out in the wasteland, enslaved to sin, in need of deliverance. But it's not just a description of Israel, is it? It's a description of us. And when we think about our own salvation, we need to realize that God Himself came to earth to mend a brokenness that we could not fix ourselves.

And that's important to keep in mind because right at the very end of this phrase, we see not only the state of our deliverance but the scope of our deliverance. So notice the way that John emphasizes that the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. You know, so we hear that language, sin of the world. We hear it over and over. We think, that's just a Bible phrase. We hear it, we see it, we read it, it's everywhere. It doesn't sound surprising to us. And in some respect that's good. But to just think about, put yourself in the place of the people hearing this for the first time. Because particularly, to Jewish ears in the first century, that defies every single expectation they would have. Because they had a belief that a Messiah would come; there were promises of the Messiah. But they thought that a messiah was coming just for Israel. That the Messiah was coming to save them, to restore them as a people, as a country. But God comes in and shows that His mercy is not just to a particular tribe, but to every tribe, every tongue, every single nation. And the text says that God is coming, not just to deal with Israel, but to deal with the entire universe and all of us. The text says that the Lamb of God also takes away the sin of the world. In the original language, this word has the idea of bearing weight or carrying something away. It's a word that's used in the present tense but it has implications for the future. And that's just what we see in the Gospel, isn't it? God bears the penalty of our sin. He carries it away and He offers mercy and redemption and grace in the wilderness of our own sin. And what we see right here in this passage is that God does what He promises He will do. God does what He says He will do. And in doing what He says that He will do, we also see a surprise in our deliverance. So we see a surprise, not only in the sense that the Lamb of God, He comes for the entire world, but we see a surprise in the way that He brings about that deliverance.

So I want you to think for just a second about how does God save and redeem us. Because I don't know about you, but if I'm writing this script, this is not exactly how I would draw it up. So just, let's rewind all the way to Genesis. Satan tempts Adam and Eve and Adam and Eve sin. And what happens? Sin infects the entire world, the universe cracks, man's relationship with God is broken, the people of Israel are idolatrous, they're enslaved. And God is looking down on a creation that He loves and He says, "I'm going to do something about that." So far I'm tracking, but what would I want to do? I'd want to come in and if I'm in charge, I'm going to show up and I'm going to light up Satan's world like the 4th of July. I am arriving with power and with might and with glory and I'm going to do everything that I said I was going to do. But what happens here? The story we remember during Advent isn't a King's crown, but a baby's

cradle. The story and the picture that we have in this text isn't of a roaring lion, but a lamb. And the way this lamb conquers satan isn't by seizing a throne, but by bearing thorns. And how easy is it for us to look at the cradle of Jesus and to look at the crown of Jesus but forget that He has to go through a cross to get it. How easy is it for us to not want to take up that own cross in our own lives? How easy is it for us to look at what God has given us in Christ: salvation, adoption, forgiveness, redemption, joy, peace, and grumble because our life isn't exactly what we wanted or that the blessings of God didn't come to us in the way or at the time that we wanted. How easy is it for us to forget that apart from God's grace we're left in the wilderness of our own sin? We are, we see in this text a reminder during Advent, both that God will often come in and upend our expectations and God will do exactly what He says He will do. And when He does, He will often do it in a way that is more glorious and more wonderful and more unbelievable than anything that you could possibly imagine.

The second thing I want to call our attention to this morning is that we look for the Lamb of God to dismantle satan's power. So we're going to look right in the middle of this verse here where John the Baptist declares Jesus to be the Lamb of God. So as we think about this phrase, the first thing that I just want us to think about is the strangeness of it. So Lamb of God. Just think about it as a title. Christian's have heard that phrase over and over and over again. And it makes a whole lot of sense. But it'd be easy to miss the fact that this is not something that people were expecting to hear right here. And take one step back. Think about, just put yourself in the mindset of the people here. We've got John the Baptist, who if you see what Scripture says about him, we get the picture of almost this wild-eyed prophet. He's eating bugs and he's wearing clothes and he sees his cousin, Jesus, he sees his cousin walking up and he says, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" That's not a regular Tuesday. You know, so just imagine if you can, you've got family gathered in for Thanksgiving this week and you've got one of your cousins that comes in and says, "Ladies and gentlemen, the crown prince of College Station, Uncle Bobby." That's not normal. That's not something that you would expect in a given day. But John the Baptist is not here as a first century hype man. He's saying something real and something important and he's announcing something. And that's actually what's so strange about this phrase, the Lamb of God. Because it's quite possible, scholars will say, it's quite possible that John the Baptist, in some respects, inventing a phrase right here in this passage that the apostle John is recording. Because while the phrase Lamb of God is very familiar to us, it wasn't a phrase that was used a great deal among first century Jews and across the Old Testament, in some respects. So you hear Son of David, you hear prophet, you hear Messiah. These are all common. But if you made the announcement in the first century, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Lamb of God!" People might have said, "What are you talking about, Lamb of God? What is that?" And what John is doing right here, we see this phrase, John is giving us language that is correcting Israel's expectations about what their King will be like. When you look at Israel, you see a people who have been in, held in captivity in Egypt, in Babylon, they're under the thumb of the Roman empire right here and they want a king on a throne right now to vindicate them, to restore them, to bring them peace, to bring them back. But John's telling them, "You'll get your King, but don't you remember what the Bible says in Jeremiah 11 about the one that was a gentle lamb that will be led to the slaughter?" Don't you remember the story of Abraham and Isaac where Abraham is asked to sacrifice his own son and God says, "Stop!" And He provides a lamb instead. Don't you remember what Isaiah says about how the people of God will be restored by a suffering servant? In Isaiah 53 it says, He was oppressed and He was afflicted yet He opened not His mouth like a lamb that was led to the slaughter. Don't you

remember the Passover when God is rescuing you out of Egypt by He's striking down the first born of every male in Egypt? And he says, "Go slaughter a lamb and put the lamb over the blood, put the blood of the lamb over the doorpost of your house because a lamb has to die so that you might live." And if you apply that blood to your house, you will have, you will be spared from God's judgment. Your king looks different, John is saying, right here. You see, Israel finds that hard to grasp. And so does satan because what does he do? He lashes out with Jesus with everything he has. We see Herod trying to kill all the babies across the stories of Jesus' birth. We see Jesus tempted in the wilderness by satan. We see satan entering into Judas and concocting a plot to kill Jesus. In some respects he succeeds because Jesus is killed, isn't it. And can't you just imagine satan saying, "I want to put any means necessary to stop this one from gaining power because I'm threatened by him." He think he succeeds. Can't you just imagine how the devil feels watching Jesus die on the cross. Can't you imagine what satan's thinking, "Nice try. But ever since Adam and Eve sinned, every single person in this world has joined with them and pledged their allegiance to me. You will not be king here, he must have been thinking. But what satan cannot conceive of is a king who cares more about his people than his power in the present. What satan cannot conceive of is one who would take on doom so he can bring about deliverance. What satan cannot realize is that the way this king gains his throne is by dying. So He can defeat death himself and three days after satan watches Jesus pronounced to be dead, a stone rolls away and there is a different pronouncement that is made: He is risen. And what that means is that satan, the one power that you have, death, has just been destroyed.

So when we think about Advent and we think about this season, what we need to realize is this is not just a sweet little story about a baby in a manger and about Jesus coming to earth. Advent is ultimately about war because Jesus comes to earth to invade the devil's territory. What does He do? He invades this territory in the most unthinkable way imaginable. He steps off His throne and He becomes a baby. He conquers satan in what seems to be the craziest way imaginable; by being tortured, beaten, mocked, and killed. Not like a king; but like a lamb being led to the slaughter. But that's what John is showing us. The wisdom and the victory of God. And that's why he's telling us, "Behold, the Lamb of God."

That takes us to our third and our final point here. We look at the Lamb to deepen our hope. So we see this in the very first word of the sentence. The very first word of this phrase from John. One word: behold. Behold. It's just a single word. It's not a word we use very often. It's a word that feels kind of old fashioned. But in this context, it basically means something like, don't miss this, look at this, don't miss it. And the funny thing is, it'd be really easy for us to miss it if we're not careful what all we see in this, in this word. So let's think about the situation of this statement. So think about the people of God in the first century. Think about the people of Israel. Well, more than that, think about the people of God down through the centuries. So for centuries Israel has heard the promises of God. I will give you rest. I will give you land. I will give you a king. I will give you a future. You are my beloved people and I will dwell with you. There are moments of glory all throughout the pages of Scripture when we think about Israel. Think about the Exodus and God's deliverance. Think about the might of King David. Think about the fall of the walls of Jericho. Think about the promise and the glory of the temple that they see. But there's also a great deal of pain in the history of Israel too, isn't there. There's slavery, there's conquest, they're held in Egypt, they're held in Babylon, they wander in the desert, they make golden idols, they run away from God, He rescues them and they return to their idolatry, He rescues them again and they sin, He rescues them again and they sin, over and

over and over again as a story of strife and pain and wondering, “Will God do what He said He will do for us?” And the people of God are told, “Wait. The promised one’s coming. Wait. Rest is coming. Wait. Your deliverance will come. Wait.” But think too about the fact we hold our Bibles here. And the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, you turn one page and you have the Gospel of Matthew. But this one page, the distance between these two books in our Bibles is one page. The distance between these two books in history is 400 years. 400 years spans the distance between the end of Malachi and the start of the Gospels. That’s 400 years of no prophets, no great kings, no new words from God, generations come, generations go and all they can do is wait and hope and wonder. Is God really going to make good on His promises? Is God even there? Wait.

But what are we hearing here? No wait, but behold. Behold, look, don’t miss this. After centuries and even millennia of waiting for the Promised One, we are told, behold. And we get a little bit of that this time of year. We can just imagine what it’s like around Christmas if you’ve got little children or you remember when you were young, the night before Christmas when you’re in bed and you can’t really sleep because you’re hearing noises and you’re wondering what it’s going to look like the next morning. And you’re told as children or you tell your children, just wait. But you’ve got anticipation and you’ve got longing and you’ve got wonder and then you wake up and you’re ready to go downstairs. But maybe mom and daddy aren’t ready for you to be down and you’re told, wait. And that moment comes and you round the corner and the kids behold. They’ve been told to wait. They’ve got pent up energy. They’ve got pent up excitement and they’re told, behold. And they see gifts and there’s joy and there’s excitement and there’s bursting after and there’s running after things. And what we’re dealing with here is more than just the anticipation of one night on Christmas eve. We are dealing with the pent up anticipation of the entire universe since its creation. For the dawning of a new age. For the coming of a King. Because right here we see the Creator and rightful ruler of the universe stepping into His own creation. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight, we sing. Right here we see that. Behold, John tells us. Don’t miss this, he tells us. This is the moment the entire universe has been waiting for.

But beyond the situation, let’s also think about the significance of this statement. The significance of this word, behold. Because when we think about Advent, we’re not just looking at some sort of religious countdown to Christmas. What we’re looking at is the way Advent drives us to a manger but Jesus doesn’t stay in the manger and neither should we. Advent is about recognizing the coming of Jesus. It’s about looking back to when Jesus arrived and looking ahead to when Jesus returns and longing and loving and eagerly awaiting our King who will return. And right here with this single word, John is connecting the first coming and the second coming with the word, behold. John the writer, here of the book of John, John the apostle, is using this word very intentionally here. So John the Baptist is saying it, but John the writer of the book of John is recording it. And John is recording that word elsewhere throughout the book of John in very strategic ways. In ways that highlight the birth and the death and the return of Jesus. So think about John chapter 12 when Jesus is about to go before what’s called the triumphal entry, when He’s riding a donkey into Jerusalem. What does John 12 say? Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written. Fear not, daughter of Zion, behold, your King is coming. And think about John 19 when Pilate is sending Jesus to be crucified. He says almost mockingly to the Jews in John 19, behold your King. But the important thing to remember is that this isn’t the only book of the Bible that John wrote. He also wrote the book of

Revelation. And what do we see there? We see, not first coming, but second coming. And what else do we see there? That signal in the book of Revelation by a word. By the word, behold. Revelation 1:7

⁷Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him.

Revelation 1:18

¹⁸I died, and behold I am alive forevermore,

Revelation 3:20

²⁰Behold, I stand at the door and knock

Revelation 7:9

⁹And after this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every tribe, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before, what, the Lamb,

Revelation 21:3

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.

And then the closing chapters and verses of Scripture, Revelation 21:5

⁵He who was seated on the throne said, what, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

And in the closing verses of the Bible, one of the last recorded statements that we have from Jesus in Scripture, “Behold, I am coming soon. See if we want to, we can boil Advent down to one word: behold. And not only that, but we can boil the entire Christian life, pretty much, down to one word: behold. Because if we’re in Christ, it means at some point we’ve decided that we beheld our sin and we beheld God’s grace and we see that what Jesus has to offer is more beautiful than anything the world has to offer. And if you think about the Christian life, if we are in Christ, that’s what we’re supposed to do every single day. Look back to the cross. Look ahead to Jesus’ return and live in light of that reality. The call of God on your life every single day is to look away from your sin and behold the grace of God. Behold Jesus. Because when we truly see Jesus for who He is, we’re dumbstruck by God’s grace. We’re in awe of God’s glory and His beauty. That’s the strategy to fight sin in your life. Behold the Lamb of God. Stand amazed at His power, at His might, at His glory. Take in the view of everything He is. Stand amazed in Him and when you do, the piddly little things that you’re tempted by and that you’re fighting will be seen for the destructiveness and the poison and the garbage that it actually is. Behold the Lamb of God.

And there may be some of us in this room right now who are weary. It may be that you have just slaved away an entire week to have people in, to prepare turkey, to get everything made, to host everybody, and there's all the normal squabbles and pain points and dinnertime discussions that may or may not have been peaceful or contentious or some mixture of the two, you're saying, "I'm tired." It could be that you're looking ahead to the Christmas season, you're trying to figure out, how will I get everything done, how am I going to accomplish what I'm supposed to do. You're weary. It could be for some of you that this is a painful time of the year. Represents a memory of something, it represents a reminder of something. I don't know. But I do know that there could be pain in this room right now. I do know that there could be weariness in this room right now. There could be people saying, "I just can't. I just don't know how I'm going to go on." And the message coming to you from this text is, "Behold, behold the Lamb of God." Because this passage reminds us that our God is a God who does the unthinkable. Our God is a God who saves the world by becoming a baby. Our God is a God who conquers Satan by dying and then defeats death by rising. If the God of the universe can show up in the wreckage of a broken world, He can show up in the messiness of your life. And the promise of the Gospel is that if you cling to Christ, He will. He will show up. He will give you grace. He will give you peace. So put your hope in Him. Find your rest in Him. And there may be some of you in this room who've not yet trusted Christ. And what I would ask you to do is behold what this passage is saying right here. There's a story in the Old Testament, I mentioned it briefly earlier, about Abraham and Isaac. In the Bible, God tests Abraham by taking his only son and telling him, "I want you to kill him. I want you to put him on the altar and drive a knife right through him." And Abraham says, "OK. I don't know why, but OK." And right as the knife is going up, God says, "Stop! Now I know you love Me. That you would give your son, your only son, the son that you loved." But not only that, not only does Isaac live, not only is Isaac spared, but God provides a substitute. God provides a lamb in the thicket that they offer as a substitute instead of Isaac. But what we need to see here is that when God spares Isaac, God does for Abraham and Isaac what He does not do for His own Son. Because God gives up His own Son. And instead of providing a lamb so that His Son might not die, He sends His own Son to die. That's what this passage in John is about. There is no lamb that spares Jesus from death. Jesus is God's own lamb. And that lamb spares you from death. And if you're not a Christian, that means Jesus died for you. It means He stood in your place and paid the penalty for your sin, but His death only counts if you turn away from your sin and trust in Christ. Jesus is saying to you, "Behold, I stand at the door of your heart and knock. If you trust in me, I will save you." The birth of Jesus, Christmas, the Christmas season, what we celebrate about Christ is a happy time. But it's only happy if you trust in Jesus and that payment becomes yours and that penalty that's paid becomes yours and that substitute becomes yours.

So what I want to ask you, if you're not a Christian, if you feel a weight in your soul about that at all this morning, would you come and talk to one of our ministers that will be down front when we have a time of response here in just a few moments? But regardless of who you are, and regardless of what's going on right now, as we enter into this season, remember the fullness of what we celebrate in Advent. What God tells us is that He's coming. He's come to a manger and He's coming in the sky. He's coming again and what God tells us to do is behold. The story that we celebrate when we talk about Advent is one that starts with a cradle and moves to a cross and ends with a crown. And uniting all of them is the word, behold. Before the cradle, we hear Luke 1:31

³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

And before the cross, we hear John 1:29

²⁹Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And before the crown, we hear Revelation 22:7

⁷Behold, I'm coming soon.

So we're in a time of year that we sing great, rich, Christmas songs just like the ones that we sang this morning. And at its core, many of these songs are really a story of the Gospel. What we sing so much this time of year, we look back to the birth of Jesus and we sing, He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found. That's the Gospel. We look forward to His return and we sing, the thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder in the future breaks a new and glorious morn. Fall on your knees. In other words, behold the Lamb of God who has come and is coming soon.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You. We thank You for Your goodness. We thank You for loving us so much that You would not let us languish in the wilderness of our own sin. But You visited our creation, You stepped of Your throne and became one of us, died as one of us, died for us so that we might dwell with You in eternity. That we might enjoy Your grace and goodness and mercy. And I pray that You would give us rest. I pray that for all the people in this room that You would work Your divine effect of this text on our hearts for Your sake and for Your glory. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.