



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 1:29, 6:52-59

“Death of the Son in Prophecy”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are studying the Johannine Theology, and tonight we're going to look at “The Death of the Son in Prophecy” as is presented in John's Gospel. The outline is very brief and to the point, I hope. And our Scripture reading will be John chapter 1, verse 29, in a moment and then John chapter 6, verse 52 through verse 59, but as the outline suggests, let me begin with a word of introduction.

I would imagine that if you ask individuals who study the Bible constantly, particularly, those who study it doctrinally, what is the most important word in Christian theology, probably more would agree that “atonement” is the most important word in Christian theology, than upon any other word. “Atonement” without question is one of the great words of the Christian faith, and it may be the most important word in Christian theology. It is derived from two English words; one, the simple preposition “at” and then the old middle English archaic word “onement,” “at-onement.” And, of course, the idea that lies back of it is the thought of being in union in harmony, “at-onement.” Now biblically, surprisingly, it's not a New Testament word. In fact, it never occurs in the New Testament at all.

Now, I know that some of you may have an Authorized Version before you, and you'll remember that it does occur in the Authorized Version. In Romans chapter 5 and

verse 11, one finds the word “atonement,” but there it is really the mistranslation of the Greek word that means “reconciliation,” which elsewhere is generally rendered “reconciliation.” So the word does not occur in the New Testament. It would seem strange, I imagine, for an individual who thought that a word must be in the New Testament for someone to say, “The word ‘atonement’ is probably the most important word in Christian theology.” Occasionally, I’ve made that statement in various places, and usually someone will come up afterwards and say, “But Dr. Johnson, don’t you know the word ‘atonement’ doesn’t even occur in the New Testament.” And, of course, I have to say, “Yes, I understand it doesn’t occur in the New Testament,” but when one uses the term “atonement,” he uses it with the sense that Christian theology has given it. It’s one of those words that is a theological word but not a New Testament biblical word. It is an Old Testament biblical word but not a New Testament biblical word. It’s like the word “Trinity.” Trinity’s extremely important but, of course, the word “Trinity” does not occur in the New Testament, but there is hardly any other doctrine concerning the nature of God that is more important than the doctrine of the Trinity.

We don’t have the term “old nature” or “new nature”; things like this in the New Testament either or in the Bible, for that matter. And, yet, they are very important theological words. They are words designed to express what the Bible says in its use of terms but, unfortunately, the biblical terms have been given different interpretations, and because they’ve been given different interpretations, it’s necessary for Christian theologians and biblical students to discuss the differences and arrive at what they feel is the biblical teaching, and in so doing they have often used words that are not found in the Bible to express the biblical teaching. That’s why we have the doctrine of the Trinity. It’s a very important Christian doctrine. The word’s not there but the doctrine is there. And in fact, that’s the best word for expressing the fact that the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God, and, yet, there is one God. In other words, the distinction is a personal distinction and not an essential distinction and the way to express that is to use

the word “Trinity.” So words that are not found in the Bible may be the best words to express what is found in the Bible.

So the word “atonement” does not occur in the New Testament, but it’s a very important word theologically. What it has come to mean theologically, is, well, it has to do with what Jesus Christ has accomplished in his sufferings and death. So “atonement” is a reference to what Jesus Christ did in his sufferings and in his death, so when we speak about the restoration of men from the shattered relationship that existed between God and him before the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ, we’re talking about “atonement.” So “atonement” then has to do with the restoration of the shattered relationship between God and man, and it is something accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ in his sufferings and in his death. Atonement; a very important word. Don’t let anyone come to you and say, “Well, it doesn’t occur in the New Testament; therefore, it must not be important.” It’s used theologically. It’s a theological word. Biblically it does not occur. Biblically, in the Old Testament, the term “atonement” had to do with the covering of sin, but the covering of sin was not the complete dealing of God with sin. Finally, when Jesus Christ came, in the sufferings that he accomplished, sin was done away with, and so in that sense, “atonement” is not a proper New Testament word, if it simply meant “to cover sin.” But theologically, it means all that Jesus did in his sufferings and in his death, so we’re using the term “atonement” in that sense.

In the history of the doctrine of the atonement, attention has centered upon a number of theories, because after all, when we say, “Atonement is what Jesus Christ did in his sufferings and death; it’s the restoration of the shattered relationship between sinners and a Holy God.” One might ask, “But how was atonement accomplished?” And different answers have been given to that question. How was the atonement accomplished? And that introduces us to theories of the atonement or explanations of the means by which Jesus Christ restored the shattered relationship between man and God. It’s not enough to say he restored it. We want to know how he did it, and so in the

history of theology, a great deal of attention has been directed to theories of the atonement. All explanations are theories of the atonement, even the correct explanation in the eyes of orthodox theologians is a theory of the atonement. Now, if it's the correct theory, of course, it has the blessing of God, but it still is a theory of the atonement. It's an answer to the question, “How did Jesus Christ restore the shattered relationship?”

Among the theories that have been advanced is one theory with variations in which the atonement terminates upon Satan. This was a very popular theory in the early days of the Christian Church. It was a theory associated with very well-known men, such as Irenaeus, one of the finest of the early theologians; also associated with the famous Alexandrian theologian, Origen. The idea runs through many forms, speaking in some of them, of buying off Satan; in some of them, in overcoming Satan – Satan; in some of them, even of outwitting the devil. In fact, in some of the explanations of how Jesus Christ accomplished the atonement terminating upon Satan, it was said that, “Jesus Christ is the worm on the hook, by which God finally caught Satan.” So many explanations have been given to explain how the Lord Jesus Christ restored the shattered relationship between man and God; theories that pertain to Satan.

Now, of course, when we look at this subject from the standpoint of the Bible, we notice immediately that there is a whole lot in the Bible that has to do with our Lord's atoning work with reference to Satan. In fact, the very first statement in the Bible about atonement is a statement in which Satan is involved, so it's not surprising that theories of the atonement should draw upon the relationship between our Lord's saving work and Satan. Remember in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had sinned and gone had come down into the garden, and he pronounces his curse upon the woman, and then as he speaks to the serpent, rather, let me go back and say, as he begins to speak of his judgments upon the woman, upon the serpent, and upon the man, he begins by saying in verse 14 of Genesis chapter 3, “And the Lord God said to the serpent; because you've done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field. On

your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” So here in the very first statement of the Bible concerning atonement, how God would restore the shattered relationship between man, now a sinner, and a Holy God. Reference is made to the fact, that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. So in any explanation of the doctrine of the atonement, one must find some place in it for our Lord dealing with Satan.

Now, we have in the New Testament, more or fuller statements concerning this. For example, in the Epistle to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul writes in the 2nd chapter and in the 15th verse, “When he had disarmed the rulers and authorities, he made a public show of them, having triumphed over them through him.” Now, the rulers and the authorities are the satanic rulers and authorities, and he says, that through Jesus Christ’s death on the Cross, he has triumphed over them. So Paul relates the death of the Lord Jesus Christ to the devil.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the 2nd chapter and in the 15th verse, 14th and 15th verses of his epistle says these words. Hebrews 2:14 and 15, “Since then, the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise also partook of the same; that through death he might render powerless him who had the power of death; that is, the devil and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.” So the write of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that the Lord Jesus Christ came in order to render powerless the devil by virtue of his atoning work. And then the Apostle John in the 1st epistle, in the 3rd chapter and the 8th verse also says something parallel with those preceding statements. He says, “The one who practices sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose; that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

So one theory of the atonement then, looks at our Lord Jesus Christ in his atoning work, as designed primarily to overthrow Satan, so the theory has the atonement terminating upon Satan. Any kind of theory of the atonement must take that into consideration, as these texts from both the Old Testament and the New Testament set forth.

A second of the theories that has been propounded in ancient times, and in modern times to some extent is the theory and similar theories called “mystical theories” in which the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ terminates physically upon man; a kind of salvation by incarnation. Now, we need not go into the explanation of this because we don’t have time to do it, but that also is a form of the atonement theory that has been propounded by important people. Schleiermacher, famous German theologian; the Mercer’s Burk School in this country, have propounded theories like this.

Thirdly, there are theories in which atonement terminates morally upon man. So we had atonement theories in which the work of Christ terminates upon Satan, as directed toward him, directed toward man physically, toward man morally. For example, the “moral influence theory of the atonement” in which a medieval theologian, Abelard, set forth the fact, that the Lord Jesus Christ died in order that his death might exert moral influence upon men, and turn them from sin. These men usually denied the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ actually died under the judgment of God as a penal sacrifice, bearing the penalty of the sins of men. Though they said that’s not the kind of thing that happened when the Lord Jesus died. What he did, was simply to die to exert moral influence upon us because one man cannot die for the sins of others, but he can by his death exert moral influence upon others.

In the time of the Reformers, a man by the name of Socinus propounded a similar theory, in which was usually called and has been called the “exemplary theory of the atonement”; the Lord Jesus dying as an example of the love and care of God, and this too is to have such an influence upon us that our lives are changed. These are the favorite

theories of popular liberal theology, and the favorite theories because of its ignorance of the deep-seeded disease of the human spirit. In those theories, you do not have any account made of the fact that man is a sinner, and God is a Holy God; no sense of a need on the part of God to punish sin; no sense of the justice of God and the righteousness of God and the holiness of his law by which men must be punished for their sins. And if there is no understanding of the deep-seated disease of the human spirit then, of course, atonement theories that offer us nothing but saccharin drafts of human self-sufficiency, are popular with people who listen to them. Like saccharin in strong doses, it leaves a bitter taste, but nevertheless, it does not help.

It's no wonder, that a bitter young man who came to understand the true teaching of the Bible after having imbibed that kind of theory, exemplary theory of the atonement, moral influence theories of the atonement finally wrote, when he realized that those theories cannot bring a man to the possession of eternal life said, “God will pardon prostitutes, assassins, thieves, sexual perverts. He will pardon all of us miserable sinners, but he will never pardon liberal theologians.” Well, there is a lot of truth in that because you see, what a liberal theologian does is offer you saccharin instead of sugar. He offers you the counterfeit instead of the real thing, and he makes those who listen to them, think that they are getting the real thing. And they take that, and they imbibe that. They make it theirs, little realizing that they do not have the real thing, so when the real thing comes along, they sense no need for it, because they already have that which satisfies them in their very, very pallid view of human sin.

Now, that is the kind of theory generally, that one will find upon among liberal theologians. There are many, many men in this city in professing Christian churches that are preaching theories of the atonement like this. Now, of course, they don't usually talk about the atonement. They don't usually give addresses on the atonement, because the atonement, if you read the Scriptures, is obviously it seems of something more than that. Now, of course, there is usually a modicum of truth in all of these false theories. For

example, we do read in the Bible that Jesus Christ's death is a moral influence upon those who are the saints of God. The fact that he gave himself for his enemies is one of the bases upon which John asks us to give ourselves in sacrifice for his friends. We also read in the New Testament that the Lord Jesus Christ is an example for us, but those aspects which are true, do not give us the fullness of the biblical theory of the atonement, and if one stops with only those little aspects, the essential atoning ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is not there.

Fourthly, there are theories in which the atonement terminates primarily on man but secondarily on God. One of these theories is very popular still with Arminians. It's usually associated with Hugo Grotius, one of the outstanding Arminians of the seventeenth century. Hugo Grotius was a well-known lawyer and a very accomplished man in his field. He wrote a work that could be called a great work because of its size, and because of its contents. It was called *Defensio Fidei Catholicae de Satisfactione Christe* or “A Defense of the Catholic Faith Concerning the Satisfaction of Christ” in which he abandoned the faith that he assumed to defend. No one except a few of the Arminians have really held to Grotius' theories; a great big book which was supposed to be a defense of the Catholic faith, but in reality it was an attack on the orthodox faith in Christ.

The governmental theory presupposes all the positive truth contained in the moral influence theory, but justice in God is not vindicatory justice, but it's to be referred to a general governmental rectitude, based upon a benevolent regard for the highest, ultimate, and most general well-being of the subjects of his moral government. Law is considered to be the product of the divine will and, therefore, it may be relaxed. Because law is the product of the divine will, well, God has the freedom to relax his law if he likes. God's sovereign right includes the sovereign prerogative to pardon, just to pardon, upon no just basis, necessarily, as we might consider it, but to pardon because he's a sovereign God. In other words, what did Christ do but set us an example of suffering, which lets us know

that God is displeased with human sin? But human sin is not paid for, but the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is designed to let us know, that God in his government is displeased with sin. That theory is very common among Arminian theologians.

So Christ's sufferings were not punishment. They're simply an example of God's determination to punish those who sin against him. They were designed not to satisfy divine justice, but to impress the public mind of the moral universe and of the consequences of sin. Of course, one might say in opposition to this that, “How can you convince people that God is going to punish sin, if he does not really punish sin?” So only a bona fide punishment can be an example of a punishment or a proof of God's determination to punish sin. It ignores the essential justice of God, which requires that sinners suffer for their sin and so, consequently, the atonement that terminates primarily on man, secondarily on, God the rectoral or governmental theory of the atonement is lacking, because the penal aspect of the atonement is not there.

Sin is not really paid for in the death of Jesus Christ, and so the orthodox Christians down through the years have propounded explanations of the atonement, in which the atonement terminates primarily on God and secondarily on man. And the highest form of penal satisfaction theory of the atonement is found in the writings of men like Calvin, and then later on, the standard orthodox men from Calvin's day. I think, a careful understanding of what John is trying to say about Jesus Christ's work, would land John in the company of the penal satisfaction theory of the atonement; that is, that the Lord Jesus Christ came in order to die under the judgment of God. The holiness of God is upheld. His law is upheld by the fact that the Son of God bears the judgment that is due others. He actually bears the penalty of human sin. That more than anything else, lets the world know that God punishes sin. Further, he does it as a substitute; that is, he acts as a representative for the people of God, and bears their judgment, the infinite judgment of God, upon human sin. So it is a satisfaction of the righteousness and holiness of God by the bearing of the penalty as a representative for sinners. So the orthodox theory of

the atonement is generally been expressed as a penal satisfaction theory through substitution. Now, it's possible to have substitution, and not satisfaction. There are different ways in which substitution has been explained.

Occasionally, I have individuals come to me and say, “You know, I didn't know that Professor so-and-so was orthodox, but he talks about the substitutionary theory of the atonement.” Oh, how gullible the saints of God sometimes are, simply because they don't read the Bible, and simply because they don't study the doctrines of the word of God. Today, there are many people who say, “I believe in the substitutionary atonement of Christ” but who deny the penal aspect. So you see, if we are really going to understand the Scriptures, and if we are really going to understand the salvation that is in Christ, and the means by which we have eternal life, it's necessary for us to develop some doctrinal perception and, furthermore, not to accept everything that we hear just because brother or sister so-and-so has said it and that applies to me as well as anyone else.

Well now, let's take a look in the remainder of the time that we have, to the atonement of the Son in prophecy, as set forth in the Johannine literature. And first of all, we want to look at the witness of John the Baptist to atonement, and so we're going to turn to John chapter 1 in verse 29. This is in the earlier part of his Gospel and here John will identify the Lamb of God, and this will give us some understanding of the kind of atoning theory that John the Baptist had in his mind. Now, I'm not suggesting that if you and I walked up to John the Baptist, and we were to ask him, “John, what's your theory of the atonement?”, that he would say, “Well, later on Lewis will explain it all to you, but I hold to the penal satisfaction by substitution theory of the atonement.” So far as we know, he did not know those precise words, so I'm not suggesting that that's exactly what John would say but, I think, if John the Baptist were sitting in the audience here and he heard me say that Jesus Christ died as a substitute, he bore the penalty for our sins, and, furthermore, in his death the holiness and righteousness of God was satisfied in the sense that God's holiness and righteousness, his law was upheld in the death of Jesus Christ,

freeing him to give salvation to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, he would say, “My, I’ve not found such good theology in all of Israel.” Something like that. But, nevertheless, I think seriously, John would say, “Well, that’s the way I understand it.” Now, of course, he would put it in a better way, no doubt, than I do. But, nevertheless, that’s about what he would say.

Now in verse 29 in the earlier part of the Gospel of John, John has given us some testimony in the preceding verses. That’s the section we’re going to look at, the Lord willing, this coming Sunday in the Sunday morning message verse 19 and following, but in the twenty-ninth verse we read, “The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” And in this verse, of course, he makes the identity of the Lamb of God. It was a momentous day of a momentous week and on this momentous day John the Baptist identifies the Lord Jesus, as the one of whom he has been speaking in his preceding testimony. He does it with an with an exclamation. He says, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” But we are particularly interested in the identity of the expression, “the Lamb of God”. Now of course, if you were to ask the average Christian who’s been exposed to simple Bible teaching, such as we give here in the Chapel, probably almost all of us would say, “Well, that’s a very familiar expression; the Lamb of God, and it’s clear to me, that the Lamb of God is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.” Well now, this is a very familiar expression, but the identity of this expression and the source of it is not all that clear, as you will see in just a moment I think.

First let me say that when he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God” that little prepositional phrase, “of God” refers to the source from which the Lamb of God has come. In other words, “Behold, the Lamb provided by God” is the idea that lies back of it. In chapter 6 in verse 33, we read, “For the bread of God, is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world.” So the bread of God is that which is come from heaven. The Lamb of God is he who has come from heaven, so the “of God” means

he has been provided by God. Do you know, that there are nine different interpretations, at least, that have been placed upon the expression, “Lamb of God”? For example, the “Passover lamb”. Some have said, “Behold, the Lamb of God; the Passover lamb.” Well, that’s a natural interpretation, no doubt. Others have said, “No, the reference here is not to the Passover lamb, but to the lamb that is led to the slaughter, referred to in Isaiah chapter 53 in verse 7.

Now, in Isaiah chapter 53, verse 7, we read, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth.” So the Lamb of God is a reference to the lamb led to the slaughter in Isaiah 53. Still others say, “No, the reference is to the servant of the Lord.” The reason for that is that the word for “lamb” in Aramaic, the word *talia* is a word that means either the lamb or the boy or the servant. And there is a Greek word use throughout Isaiah chapter 42, and following, for the servant of Jehovah, which means both a boy, and a servant, and its used also in the Book of Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ, boy or servant. And so since that word in Aramaic may mean both of those things, it is thought by some that this is a reference to the servant of Jehovah, the great one that Isaiah prophesied about who will come and die for the sins of the people. So “Behold, the Lamb of God” is a reference to “Behold, the servant of God.” That’s really the reference, according to this theory.

Still other have said, “No, this is the gentle lamb referred to by Jeremiah in the eleventh chapter of his book. Did you know that Jeremiah is referred to as a “lamb led to the slaughter?” And so some have said, “No, this ‘Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world’ is a reference to the statement in Jeremiah.”

The sixth explanation that has been offered, is that the Lamb of God is the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement. You remember the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement? Two goats were taken. One goat was slain, the blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. That was directed toward God. And then the other goat, the scapegoat, had

confessed over him, the sins of the people, and then it was sent off into the wilderness. These two goats, designed by God, evidently, to express two sides of the sacrifice of Christ; that is, that his death is a satisfaction of God's requirement because of human sin, of death. And then as a result of the death, the freedom and remission and release from the penalty, and that's signified by the scapegoat being sent off into the wilderness, so the sins are put away, as well as paid for. And, “Behold, the Lamb of God” is in the minds of some interpreters, a reference to the scapegoat.

Then others have said, “No, John's thinking about the triumphant lamb of the apocalypses, particularly the apocalypse of the Apostle John. “Behold, the Lamb of God”; that is, the lamb that has overcome Satan on his cross. And still others have said, “The God-provided lamb of Genesis 22:8, when Abraham offered up Isaac” and as he was getting ready to slay Isaac remember, God interrupted him, and there was a ram caught in the thicket, and the ram caught in the thicket was offered instead of Isaac, and Isaac went free. “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”; a reference to, according to this theory, the God-provided lamb of Genesis 22, the sacrifice of Isaac. And still others have suggested a ninth interpretation of the guilt offering of Leviticus chapter 14 in verse 12. Well, isn't it interesting how many explanations have been offered of, “Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world?”

Now, suppose you were asked what yours was. Well, you probably would say, I would imagine most individuals exposed to expository Bible teaching would say, “Well, this is probably a reference to the Old Testament revelation concerning the lamb, as a figure of the redeemer to come.” And you probably would gather up in your explanation, all of the things that are said about the “lambs” of the Old Testament. I imagine some of you might even go back to Genesis 4, and the sacrifice of Abel, and then you'd talk about the sacrifice of Isaac, and then you would talk about the Passover lamb particularly. You probably would include in your explanation, Isaiah 53 because in that particular passage, we have our Lord referred to as a “lamb led to the slaughter.” So you probably would

gather up a good many of these theories into one, and express it in a sort of a compound of these different aspects.

Interpreters, however, like to put their finger specifically on the source of a statement like this, and there is some value in being specific. Now, it so happens, and as far as I'm concerned, I think, the reference of the title is to Isaiah chapter 53 in verse 7, where we read, “Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter; like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth.” And I'd like to suggest to you some reasons why, I think, that, that is the reference of John the Baptist when seeing the Lord Jesus coming he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

Well, in the first place, the term must have an Old Testament background because John doesn't give us any explanation, and he expects his listeners to understand. When he shouts out, “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,” we don't have any reference to anyone saying, “Wait a minute John. What do you mean by lamb?” Why, he doesn't feel any need to explain that, so we, I think, are proper in suggesting that the reason he doesn't feel any need of explaining what is meant by “the lamb” is that it's found already in the Scriptures with which they were very familiar. Well now the greatest passage on “the lamb” in the Old Testament contrary to the opinion of some is not Exodus chapter 12. It's not Genesis chapter 22. It is Isaiah chapter 53. The reason for that is in Isaiah chapter 53, explanation theologically is given of what the lamb does, for there over and over and over again in Isaiah 53, he is set forth as the substitutionary penal sacrifice for our sins. Listen to what is said, just to take one text for it would takes us days to expound this passage, in the sixth verse we read, “All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord hath caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.” So we have substitution taught. We have penal substitution taught, “For the iniquity of us all has fallen on him.” And we also have, implicit in this section, the necessity of this because it is the Lord who has caused the iniquity of us all to fall upon him. It pleased the Lord to bruise him because the Lord

must be satisfied in his holiness and righteousness in order that he may provide redemption for his people.

So I suggest to you that this is the greatest passage on “the lamb” in the Old Testament, and this is probably the passage that John had in mind, but I do think it is the culmination of the teaching of Genesis 22:8, and it’s the culmination of the teaching in Exodus 12, and the Passover, which itself is a development of the teaching, with reference to the sacrifice of Isaac. Furthermore, when we remember that John saw himself as the herald of the servant of Jehovah, who is the lamb who is taken to the slaughter, then the identification becomes more probable. And furthermore, right in the preceding context, he’s already quoted from Isaiah. Verse 23, says, “He said, ‘I’m a voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as Isaiah the prophet said.’” So John is full of Isaiah. He’s already said, that he’s the ambassador of the king, just like Isaiah says, and now he sees the Lord Jesus coming and he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,” it seems to me very likely that he was referring to our Lord as the lamb led to slaughter, set forth in Isaiah 53 as the sacrifice for sinners.

In other places in the Book of Matthew, John is revealed as a student of Isaiah. He was an individual who studied Isaiah. If you sat down with John the Baptist and started talking about Isaiah, he’d tell you a few things about that book because he had studied that book. In fact, when John asked, “Who you are,” remember when he was in prison, he sent messengers to the Lord Jesus and he said, “Who are you?” The reason he was disturbed was because he had announced him as the ambassador, but now he’s in prison and he wonders if maybe he’s made a false identification. And the Lord Jesus said among other things, “Not only John is the greatest of those among women,” but he also said, “Go back and tell John.” And do you remember what he said? Well he said, “Tell John that lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the blind receive their sight, the Gospel, the good news is preached to sinners.” Do you know what that text is? That’s Isaiah chapter 35. He said, “Go back and tell John, that what the prophet said in Isaiah 35 is coming to

pass.” John was a student of Isaiah. Our Lord knew it. He said, “Go back, and tell him to read his book. Read Isaiah. Make the identification.”

I think, also, this identification again occurs in the Johannine literature in Revelation chapter 5 in verse 6, where we have the great vision there of the lion of the tribe of Judah who has prevailed, and John the apostle turns to look at the lion of the tribe of Judah, notice I'm saying, “li-on.” That's for the Yankees who are in the audience tonight. “Li-on.” We down here south of the Mason-Dixon line, we just say, “lion.” But “li-on, the li-on of the tribe of Judah.” And when John turned, he saw a lamb, but he saw the lamb as it had been slain or slaughtered. In other words, the very same description that is given in Isaiah chapter 53, is given in Revelation chapter 5, of the lamb. The lamb is used in Isaiah 53:7, and that passage is cited again in the Book of Acts in chapter 8, when remember Philip was preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch, and as he came up alongside the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch, he heard him reading from the Book of Isaiah. I know he must have said deep down in his heart, “The Holy Spirit has led me away from that evangelistic endeavor that was being carried on in Samaria, where we were seeing great results accomplished through the preaching and I wonder why in the world he has me come down here in the desert.” And when he heard that man reading from the Book of Isaiah, his spirit must have leapt with joy, because he said, “Ah, that's the reason I'm here. He needs explanation concerning the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world” and he was reading that precise section about the lamb led to the slaughter. And so Philip leaped up into the chariot and at that point began to preach unto him, Jesus.

Well, there's some other reasons. I won't go into them. Why, it's to my mind, fairly plain, that when John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” he was referring to the lamb led to the slaughter, to which Isaiah refers in chapter 53, of his great book. Now, if we could prove that Isaiah 53, rests on Exodus 12 in the concept of the lamb and, I think, that we could, then John 1:29, would

simply be a further development of the teaching of the Passover lamb in its highlight, Isaiah chapter 53. Now, we do know that John did think of our Lord as the Passover sacrifice. Do you know how we know that? Well because when our Lord dies on the Cross, John the apostle makes an identification of some of the things that happened there with things that were true of the Passover lamb. For example, when our Lord dies, John the apostle writing about this says, “For these things came to pass that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Not a bone of him shall be broken.” Well, that’s a passage from the description of the Passover lamb, so John the apostle recognized that our Lord died as the Passover lamb.

So it would appear to me then that simple Bible students are right after all. What we do have is a teaching concerning the term “lamb” through the Old Testament, which develops beginning in the earlier parts of the Book of Genesis, reaches one of its high points in the Passover account, reaches its climax, its climactic point in Isaiah chapter 53, in the full description of the Lamb of God and his atoning work and is highlighted by John the Baptist’s identifying expression, “Behold” as he looked at the Lord, “the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.” So the Passover lamb, the servant of Jehovah, are connected by John in New Testament theology.

Now, what about the work of the Lamb of God? Well, notice what he says about him. He says, “who taketh away the sin of the world.” That participial clause, “Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,” it’s participial in the original text, signifies at least two things: atonement or the removal of the guilt of sin, and you can see the penal aspect because lying back of it is Isaiah chapter 53, “The Lord has caused to smite upon him the iniquity of us all.” He bears the penalty that is due sinners; that is, due the people of God. So his sacrificial work is a penal work. Now, lay hold of that, and hold fast to it because that is important for a true understanding of what Jesus Christ did. God is a holy God, and he must punish sin. That’s his nature. He is a holy, just God. If he were to fail to do that, he would not be a holy God, so he must punish sin,

and he does punish sin in the substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s the second thing. “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” He takes away the sin of the world. It is substitutionary. He takes it away for the sinners in the world, so to “take away the sin of the world” implies penal aspect, Lamb of God; “Take away the sin of the world” implies substitution; a penal substitutionary work.

Now, I know, someone will say, “Well, it says he takes away the sin of the world.” That’s right. It does. Later on it says, “He’s the savior of the world.” What is meant by that? That everybody is saved? No. That everybody may be saved? Well, of course, everyone who believes may be saved. But when he says, “savior of the world,” he’s speaking out of his Jewish background. He means, not only are Jews saved but Gentiles also. He’s the “savior of the world”; savior of Jews and Gentiles.

Now, if we are to take this literally, in the sense starkly literally, “savior of the world” would mean he saves everybody, but we know that the Scriptures do not teach universalism. They teach rather that he saves his people. He is called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins, but his people are both Jews and Gentiles. His people are the world. So the “savior of the world” means, he’s not only a Jewish savior, in the fourth chapter he’ll talk about worship in Jerusalem, but now you worship in spirit and in truth. They’re no limitations. John announces this that there is going to be a world-wide salvation and so out of every kindred tribe, and tongue, and nation, not all but “out of.” Some are saved.

Now, the witness of our Lord to atonement. We have just a few moments, but let’s turn to John chapter 6, and again we’re talking about prophecy because the atoning work is not yet accomplished. Our Lord is still speaking in his incarnate state, and so this text is one that we want to take a look at. Incidentally, there are a number of other passages to which we could look. For example, John chapter 10, verse 11 through verse 18. In the exposition of the Gospel of John, we’ll deal with this passage in detail. Let’s just take one of them. John 6:52 through 59, and this will tell us the witness of our Lord

to atonement before, or as I put it in the heading here, “in prophecy.” He’s talking about what is going to be done. John 6:52, we read, “The Jews, therefore, began to argue with one another saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’” Remember, he’s talking about the necessity of eating his flesh, and drinking his blood. He’s given us the great discourse on the Lord as the “bread of life” and that caused questions. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Jesus, therefore, said to them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me, he also shall live because of me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. He who eats this bread shall live forever. These things he said in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.’”

Well now, this was a very difficult thing for the disciples. We read, “Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this said, “This is a difficult saying. Who can listen to it?” But Jesus, conscious that his disciples grumbled at this said to them, ‘Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit, and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him, and he was saying for this reason, ‘I have said unto you, that no one can come to me unless he has been granted unless it has been granted him from the Father.’” Those are difficult words.

Now, this passage is a passage in which we have to ask ourselves the question, “What’s the meaning of flesh and blood?” Well, he’s been talking about the “bread of God” in verse 33. “For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and

gives life to the world” and he said, he’s the “bread of life.” So the “bread of God” is evidently, his flesh and his blood, as he spells out later in the sermon. Two activities are ascribed to him. It is said, he came down from heaven. Verse 51, “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven.” Verse 58, “This is the bread which came down out of heaven.” In other words, “I am the incarnate Son.” That’s a reference to the incarnation, “The word became flesh.”

The second thing that is said about him is that “he gave his flesh for the life of the world”. Now, that’s a reference to his vicarious satisfaction in his death. But what’s the meaning of “eating and drinking” if his flesh and his blood are just statements that refer to him as the “bread of life?” What is “eating and drinking?” Well, this is a very graphic way of referring to believing in Christ, as the crucified one. Look at verse 35. “Jesus said to them; I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.” Coming is believing. Verse 40, “For this is the will of my Father; that every one who beholds the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I myself will raise him up at the last day.” To behold the Son there is to believe him. Verse 47, “Truly, truly I say to you, ‘he who believes has eternal life.’” He’s talking about eating and drinking. This is a very vivid way to refer to the spiritual nutrition of the soul; personal assimilation is in view. When a man eats and drinks, he takes material food and drink into his body, and there is an assimilation of it that takes place.

Johnnie Calvin has something to say about this. Johnnie says, “Faith alone is, so to say, the mouth and stomach of the soul.” So what is his flesh and his blood? Well, his flesh and his blood is simply our Lord himself. What is eating and drinking? Eating and drinking is to believe in him; to take him into us, assimilate him into us; that’s what believing is. That’s what receiving is. That’s what beholding is.

What can we say of the results of his work? Well, his work is vicarious. By the way, “vicarious” is just another term for “substitutionary.” Verse 51, “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever, and the

bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” So his work is vicarious. He gives his flesh for the life of the world. That Greek preposition used to be regarded by Greek grammarians as a preposition that meant simply, “for the benefit of,” and the context then would be studied to perceive the precise force, and it was generally felt, primarily by the liberals, that “for the benefit of” could not mean “instead of” in the substitutionary sense because there is another Greek preposition which means “instead of” perhaps more often, or more plainly than this particular preposition. Those individuals only reveal the fact that they had never studied classical Greek. In classical Greek, you pair the preposition used here, “for the life of the world” is a Greek preposition that frequently referred to substitution. This is a reference to a vicarious or substitutionary work. He gives himself for the life of the world. Other passages in the Gospel state that.

Secondly, his death provides eternal life. Verse 53, he says, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves.” Verse 54, “He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood has eternal life, I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” Verse 58, “This is the bread which came down out of heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. He who eats this bread shall live forever.” So in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, the results of his work include substitution, and secondly, eternal life. Presupposed of course, is eternal death, spiritual death, alienation from God. The Lord Jesus Christ came to provide life. Why? Because men are dead. That’s why. Men are dead. Anytime you read about eternal life being offered, you know men don’t have life. Men are dead, and so implicit in this, is the doctrine of total depravity; not that men are as bad as they can be, but that all the faculties of men have been touched by sin; their emotions, their minds, and their wills. Their wills are unable to turn to the Lord God. Don’t like that, do you? Naturally you don’t. Now, when you become a Christian, and you begin to see what the Bible teaches, you love that doctrine. Do you know why? Because you can remember

the time when you thought that you had the power to turn, and you couldn't turn, and you were frustrated because you couldn't. But then, finally, you came to learn that you cannot turn. You must cast yourself upon the mercy of God, and the Scriptures reveal that what we cannot do, he does for us by his efficacious grace. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” That's part of our depravity. Eternal life means we were dead.

And finally, his death provides union with himself. Verse 56 says, “This is the bread which came down out of heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. He who eats this bread shall live forever.” So to eat bread; to eat his flesh, to drink his blood is to experience the life of Christ. He mediates life, and is the life himself. And his death also provides resurrection, for we read in verse 54, “I will raise him up at the last day.” That's the climax of God's plan. From depravity, via sanctity, via substitutionary death, to glory. Isn't that a magnificent prospect? Tremendous thing to realize, that we were dead, and we shall not only be alive, but actually resurrected with a body like unto his own glorious body.

Isn't it sad, that the Bible has to record the response to such a message, as being largely negative? Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Why? Well, in the sixtieth verse they said, “This is a hard to take statement.” That's the meaning of the Greek word *skleros* there. “Hard to take” that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood if we are to have life. Then, of course, you know that Peter makes one of his great statements. As a result of this, in the sixty-sixth verse, “Many of his disciples withdrew, and were not walking with him any more. Jesus therefore said to the twelve, ‘You don't want to go away also, do you?’ Simon Peter said, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’”

Let me summarize. It's clear from these texts that we've looked at, that the Johannine teaching on the atonement, falls within that fifth category that we were talking about right in the beginning. He proclaims a theory of the atonement that terminates

primarily on God in which his righteousness and holiness is satisfied by the death of the Son; secondarily of men, in that we are redeemed through the payment of the sacrifice, the penalty.

Well, let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the word. We ask Thy blessing upon each one present. May the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ strengthen us and build us up in life, the life that comes from him.

We pray in his name. Amen.