

Open Heart, Open Bible

Exodus and John's Gospel

Linking theme: Redemption

Passage for weekly reading (week 21):

John ch. 's 1 – 4

The Lamb of God

Only John's Gospel describes Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1 v.29). The O.T. shadow of this once-for-all, perfect offering was the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, through which the children of Israel obtained their deliverance (redemption). The need for blood sacrifice was then written into the Law of Moses as a temporary covering for sin and to enable worship, for we cannot worship a Holy God in our sin. Hebrews 10 v.'s 1-4 state that "the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves....because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins". God Himself had planned in eternity past to intervene in human history and shed His own blood, not merely for the remission of the sins of a particular people, but for the redemption of the whole world.

There is also another connecting thread between the Exodus story and John's beautiful gospel as it unfolds in ch.1. Exodus concludes with the glory of the Lord filling the completed Tabernacle (Ex.40 v.35). God dwelt with His people. Jesus brought that same presence back to earth in His person, and the glory of God always accompanies him as He, too, dwells ("tabernacles") amongst God's historic people. The sad irony is that the world did not recognise Him, and His own people did not receive Him. (1 v.'s 10&11).

When the living God forgives sin, He comes to dwell within those who have received His forgiveness. The result is that His presence is amongst them, and that presence is demonstrated by His glory. Moses understood this, hence his plea to God that He Himself would go with the people on their journey to Canaan, otherwise nothing would distinguish them from the pagan nations around and about (Ex. 33 v.'s 15&16). What did Moses then ask to see? The glory of God! That glory is revealed to us in Jesus, and this is what the prologue to the Gospel is teaching (v.'s 1-18, ch.1). To see Jesus was to behold the glory of God in human form, for the image of God seen in Him was totally untarnished by human fallenness.

It is John the Baptist who describes Jesus as the Lamb of God, and he who recognises the pre-existence of the Saviour. John also understood that the baptism he offered was a water baptism for repentance only. He knew that Jesus would

baptise with the Holy Spirit, a baptism of enabling power that he could never bestow (v.33). To do this, Jesus had to be the Son of God, and John witnessed this. There are seven witnesses to the Deity of Jesus throughout the Gospel, three of them being quoted in ch.1, as follows:

John the Baptist	(1 v.34)
Andrew	(1 v.41)
Nathanael	(1 v.49), the other four being:
Peter	(6 v.69)
Martha	(11 v.27)
Thomas	(20 v.28)
John himself	(20 v.31).

Jesus' response to Nathanael's confession reminds us of Jacob's dream at Bethel (Genesis 28 v.12). For Jacob, the dream assured him of angelic involvement in fulfilling the Lord's purpose for his life, and enabled him to see through the heavens into the very throneroom of God. Nathanael is promised confirmation of his confession by seeing something of the acknowledgment of Jesus' glory by the angelic host. In both instances, the heavens are "open", and the shroud of satanic darkness covering the earth is torn asunder.

Ch,2 opens with the account of the first of the seven "signs" that John describes in the Gospel. There were many others (2 v.23 & 20 v.30), but John only puts the seven on record. Perhaps this is because of his awareness of the number seven as the number of completeness in Biblical numerology (compare the frequency of the use of the same number throughout the Book of Revelation). The signs John gives us are:

- 1) **turning water into wine** (2 v.'s 1-11)
- 2) **healing the official's son** (4 v.'s 43-54)
- 3) **healing the disabled man at Bethesda** (5 v.'s 1-15)
- 4) **feeding the 5,000** (6 v.'s 1-14)
- 5) **walking on the water** (6 v.'s 16-21)
- 6) **healing the man born blind** (9 v.'s 1-7)
- 7) **raising Lazarus from the dead** (11 v.'s 38-44).

The cleansing of the Temple is recorded by John much earlier in the ministry of Jesus than in the other Gospels, the possibility being that there were two such incidents. Here, it happens at the first of Jesus' visits to the City, occurring at the time of Passover (v.13). John is revealing Jesus as the Lamb of God, so the references to Passover are particularly important. The second occurs just after the miracles (signs) of the feeding of the multitude and the walk on the water, and occasions the Lord's teaching regarding Himself as the bread of life (6 v.4); on the third time He was crucified (12 v.1-19 v.42). As the Lamb of God He had to die specifically at the time of Passover. The previous visits were in preparation for the

ultimate sacrifice. The scourging of the Temple conveyed His purity, and the feeding of the crowd and the teaching about the bread of life spoke of His provision.

The teaching of Nicodemus gives Jesus the occasion to speak to this learned religious leader about new birth, spiritual birth. The Lord makes it very clear that only belief (faith) in Him can result in eternal life, because He is God's Son. John the Baptist then testifies to Jesus' divinity, using the analogy of the attendant and the bridegroom. John knows that Jesus is the Christ of God, but also knows that He will be rejected (3 v.32). Those who reject Him reject God Himself (v.36).

Our Lord's meeting with the Samaritan woman so impacted her that her story seemed to affect the whole town (4 v.'s 28-30). It also gave Him the opportunity to say one of the most important things He ever said in regard to worship – viz. – God wanted the Israelites out of Pharaoh's domineering grip so that His "firstborn son" could worship Him (Ex.4 v.'s 22&23). God wants nothing but that those who know Him in a Father/son relationship should enjoy that relationship in worship ("the chief end of man is to worship God and to enjoy Him forever", as the Westminster Catechism famously states). He enjoys it too! (Zephaniah 3 v.17). Jesus says that the time has now come when anyone can worship the Father who will do so in spirit and in truth. We can only worship in submission to the Holy Spirit and in obedience to the truth. Such worship no longer depends on lineage or location, but flows out of filial love. This time can only now have come because the Christ has come from heaven to earth and made the way open for all to participate in it, "all who receive Him, who believe in His name" (John 1 v.12).

The disciples' puzzlement about Jesus' easy conversation with a "foreign" woman increases when He speaks to them about spiritual food – doing God's will! Now is the time for the crop to be reaped. In demonstration of this, many Samaritans now put their faith in Him.

On into the region of Galilee once more, we read of the second "sign" that John brings to our attention, the healing of the son of the royal official. This concludes the first "round" of our Lord's public ministry, before returning again to the place where the opposition was always at its most fierce – Jerusalem itself.

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1) Having read through both Genesis and Exodus in recent days, the prologue to John's Gospel helps us to see both of those foundational books in a Christian context. How does it do this for you? Please dwell a little on this wonderful passage of scripture this week and let it sink that much more deeply into your spirit.

2) John describes Jesus as both the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (my sin), and the One who will baptise with the Holy Spirit (1 v.29 and 1 v.33). Do we know Him on both counts? Could you give testimony on both counts?

3) Both in the prologue to the Gospel (v.'s 4&5), and in Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus (3 v.'s 19-21), it is stated that men either misunderstand or resist the light of God as revealed in the Saviour. John says in his first Letter that we only have true fellowship one with another as we come into the light of our Lord's cleansing and forgiveness, and are therefore people with no hidden agendas (1 John 1 v.'s 5-7). This makes the Church of Jesus utterly different from worldly institutions – but, we have to come fully into God's light for this difference to be noticeable to outsiders. Let's make this our direction – **“The path of the just is as the first gleam of dawn, shining more and more brightly to the perfect day”**

(Prov. 4 v.18).

4) Following on from (3) above, we can only worship the Father **“in spirit and in truth”** when we are willing to come fully under the searchlight of Word and Spirit (Psalm 119 v.105 and Prov. 20 v.27). Baulking at this process severely restricts our capacity to worship, for we are resisting the light of Jesus. (The Greek word for truth means nothing concealed, or, reality). Do we desire a deepening in our corporate capacity to worship God? If so, we need to come into the light a little more, get a bit more real! Then we are indeed heading into more of the light of our God, which is the outstanding characteristic of His Kingdom – the Kingdom of light (Col.1 v.12). Let's pray to that end this week.

Next week's passage: John ch.'s 5 - 8