

The Centrality of the Lamb - Part 2

by J. Sidlow Baxter

The centrality of the Lamb is the central role of Jesus Christ in biblical revelation and the doctrine of salvation, and the preaching of the Lamb is essential for the gospel of salvation.

Duration: 48:02

Scripture: Isaiah 48:22, Isaiah 53:7, Isaiah 53:10-12, Isaiah 57:21, Isaiah 66:24

Topics: "Lamb Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of recognizing the sinful nature of humanity and the need for a savior. He notes that there is a growing interest in the Bible among people who are disillusioned with false teachings. The preacher shares a personal story of someone who was influenced by their godly father's example and reading of Isaiah 53. He then discusses three key passages in the Bible that highlight the centrality of the Lamb, emphasizing the significance of understanding the complete message conveyed in these passages.

Transcript

This morning we resume our brief series of studies in the Bible doctrine of the Lamb, and I'm almost too nervous to begin when I think of this glorious, mysterious, uncreated, wonderful, divine human Savior, how He has loved us and bled on that cross to redeem us and has risen again and now occupies the throne of the universe. Who am I that I should preach Him? What words can I find to exalt Him? Brothers and sisters, what a dear, dear, wonderful Jesus is ours, isn't He? Well now, this morning, the particular aspect of our theme is the centrality of the Lamb. I shall complete it tomorrow morning, all being well.

The centrality of the Lamb. Our Lord Jesus is both the center and the circumference of divine revelation. As the sun is the center of our solar system, and the power also which holds it all together, so Christ is the magnetic center of Scripture.

And the unifying theme which makes all the threescore and six books of our Bible one self-consistent whole. As Christ is the central figure of biblical revelation, so the cross is the central factor. Whatever else our Bible may or may not be, it is distinctively and preeminently the book of salvation from sin.

And its many-sided doctrine of salvation both centers in and irradiates from the Christ of the cross. The precious blood of Calvary, so to speak, sprinkles every page. The doctrine of redemption by the Lamb runs through holy writ like a crimson cord, holding all the various parts of the sacred canon together in

one.

Mr. Chairman and friends, let me make this preliminary remark. In these days and amid the present world of new ideas, let this be more fixedly in our thinking than ever hitherto. That the Lamb is the vital center of that message which you and I are divinely intended to put over to the people of our generation.

Now, in our study yesterday morning, we reviewed the progressive unfolding of biblical disclosure concerning the Lamb in ten notable passages from Genesis to Revelation. From those ten, I now pick out three, and we may truly call them three classic passages exhibiting the centrality of the Lamb. Those three passages are 1. Isaiah 53, 2. Revelation chapter 5, and 3. Revelation chapters 21 and 22.

And those three passages display the centrality of the Lamb in the following way. First, in Isaiah 53, we see the Lamb amid the throes of His agony. Second, in Revelation 5, we see the Lamb amid the throne of His glory.

And third, in Revelation 21 and 22, we see the Lamb amid the throng of His glorified people. In Isaiah 53, we see the Lamb transfixed to the cross here on earth. In Revelation 5, we see the Lamb triumphant on the throne in heaven.

In Revelation 21 and 22, we see the Lamb transcendent forever in the new heaven and the new earth. Or, in other words, in the first of those three passages, we look back to a humiliation which is now past. In the second of those three passages, we look up to an exaltation which is now present.

And in the third, we look on to a consummation which is yet to be. So then, if you have brought your Bible with you, will you kindly turn this morning to that most famous chapter of all the Isaiah prophecies, Isaiah chapter 53, in which, as already remarked, we see the centrality of the Lamb in the bearing of our sin. Unfortunately, in our authorized version, and in the English revised and in the American standard version, Isaiah 53 reads as prose, whereas in the original Hebrew, it is superb poetry, as more recent translations bring out for us.

Not poetry, however, in the European and American style of rhyme and rhythm, but the flexible Hebrew poetry of thought-parallelism. Let me just leave my notes for a minute, and maybe I'd better just say this, I'm using notes out of humanitarian compassion for you. For on a theme like this, if I dared to speak without notes, we'd never get through.

But just a little aside, you know, of all kinds of literature, poetry is the most difficult to translate into another language. It's so difficult to reproduce the rhyme and or the rhythm. For instance, our monosyllabic word, God, I don't know any other language where the name for God is a monosyllabic.

Instead of one syllable, you've two or three. And in so many, many, many other instances, to translate by rhyme and rhythm from one tongue to another is an exquisitely exasperating task. But when God wrote poetry, he wrote it in this wonderful, flexible form of Hebrew thought-parallelism.

And with the greatest felicity, it can be translated into any language. Now, in Hebrew poetry, there are three kinds of parallels. One, complete, two, contrastive, and three, constructive.

And this 53rd chapter of Isaiah consists of 24 complete parallels. Now, complete parallels are those in which the second member of a pair extends or completes the thought in the first member. For instance, look at the beginning of the chapter, in the first of the couplets.

Who has believed our report? And to whom is Jehovah's arm revealed? In line one, the report is not received. Therefore, in line two, the Lord's arm is not revealed. Line one gives a human aspect.

Line two gives a divine aspect. Line two grows out of line one in the sense that it expresses something on the Godward side which grows out of unbelief first on the manward side in line one. Now, in all such complete parallels, that is the feature.

The second member carries forward or intensifies or amplifies or completes the content of the first member. And by the way, friends, this is not only intellectually interesting, it is exegetically important. Very often, one member of a strophe can be exegetically explained correctly by taking careful note of the companion member, the complete second line of the couplet.

I would love to go right through this chapter, dwelling on each of these complete parallels, but time will not allow that. The one thing to which I here call attention as being particularly noteworthy is this, that both the logical and poetical exact center of these twenty-four complete parallels is this. He is led as a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep dumb before its shearers.

Now, I know that some will say that the chapter ought to begin three verses earlier, but as a matter of strict grammar and exegesis, those three verses are a prelude to what is told to us about the servant of Jehovah in Isaiah 53. And let me reiterate, these two lines which I have just quoted are both the logical and the poetical center of this wonderful lamb chapter. He is led as a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep dumb before its shearers.

Of course, if we are to be truly modern, then of course our immediate reaction is to regard this as purely accidental. We are too enlightened nowadays, supposedly, to allow that divine inspiration would descend to mere grammatical contrivances. Though, as a matter of fact, it does use alphabetic mnemonics in that beautiful dirge that we call lamentations and inserting of the psalms.

But if that reference to the lamb at the exact center point of Isaiah 53 is merely coincidence, then what are we to say about this? That in the first half of the chapter, that is in the verses, the couplets preceding this central one, there are just seven expressions of vicarious atonement viewed from the human standpoint. And in the second half of the chapter, there are again exactly seven expressions of vicarious atonement viewed from God's standpoint. Now, we do not want to use one word that is not clearly understood by even the youngest and the newest convert here.

And by that word vicarious, forgive me if I'm being superfluous in explaining it, but by that word vicarious we mean something done by one in the behalf and in the stead of another. And our Lord's Calvary sufferings, of course, were substitutionary and vicarious. They were not for himself, they were in himself for us.

And let me reiterate, in the first half of this chapter there are seven expressions of vicarious atonement from our point of view, completed in the second part by seven expressions of vicarious atonement from the divine standpoint. Now, will you let me point them out? Are you ready? 1. In verse 4, He hath borne our griefs. 2. Again in verse 4, He carried our sorrows.

3. In verse 5, He was wounded for our transgressions. 4. Verse 5, He was threshed, that's the Hebrew, He was bruised for our iniquities. 5. The chastising of our peace fell on Him.

6. Again in verse 5, And with His stripes, indeed the Hebrew, I notice, is in the singular, 7. With His stripe, His back was so ploughed by the smiters, that all the furrows gradually merge into one great bleeding unity of suffering. 8. With His stripe, we are healed. 9. And 7, in verse 6, Jehovah made to meet on Him the iniquity of all of us.

Notice, dear friends, it is our griefs and our sorrows and our transgressions and our iniquities. All seven are from our side, the human side of the cross. Each of those seven statements expresses one distinct aspect of our Lord's representative and substitutionary identification with us.

Until the final comprehensive statement is reached, Jehovah hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all, which, never forget, makes our Lord's death on our behalf an act of God, not just a deed of men, not just a crucifixion, but an atonement. And now glance through the second half of the chapter, where we find, similarly, seven expressions of vicarious atonement viewed from the divine side. Some of them are so worded that we hear God speaking through the pronoun, my, or else, instead of the pronoun, our, we have their, t-h-e-i-r, as though God is viewing the cross objectively.

Let me point the further seven out. Are you ready? 1. In verse 8, For the transgression of my people, God speaking, he was stricken. 2. In verse 10, Thou, Jehovah, thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.

3. In verse 11, By his knowledge shall my righteous servant make many righteous. 4. Again in verse 11, For he shall bear their iniquities. 5. In verse 12, He was numbered with the transgressors.

6. Again in verse 12, And he bore the sin of many. 7. Still in verse 12, He made intercession for the transgressors. Well, beloved fellow Bible students, there it is, seven aspects of vicarious atonement from our point of view, followed by seven aspects of it from God's side.

And between those two sevens, He is led as a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep dumb before its shearers. Are we still quite sure that its center position happened accidentally? At any rate, and quite obviously, that is where it belongs, and again, that is where the prophet-poet put it, speaking in the Holy Spirit, which is only another way of saying, that is where God has put the lamb. Absolutely central in our salvation.

Years ago, I knew a fine Christian man in Canada. He was born and bred among the poor. At an early age, he had to leave school and go out to work.

While still young, he came to know the Lord Jesus as his precious Savior. Soon afterwards, he started a small business and covenanted to give one-tenth of all his earnings to God. His business grew and grew and grew and grew, until it became one of the largest two of its kind in the whole of Canada.

Faithfully, he gave his tithe to the Lord. Then he made it a fifth, then a quarter, then a half, then three quarters, then nine-tenths, until eventually, by the time my dear Ethel and I came to know him, he was running the whole business practically to make money for supporting the Lord's work in various ways. And thousands of people, not only in Canada and USA, but over here in Britain and on the mission fields, thousands have received liberal financial help without ever knowing from where it came.

One day I asked him what brought about his conversion to Christ, and he replied, It was the example of my godly Father. Then he told me he was one of four boys who grew up in the old home. From their youngest days, their father used to gather them round his knee while he read to them from the Bible and prayed for them and prayed with them.

And my friend said to me, On Sunday evenings, my dad would always read Isaiah 53. With a glow on his face, he would start to read it. Then on reaching verse four, Surely he hath borne our griefs.

Or verse five, He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. His voice would begin to falter.

His throat would become husky. And the tears would begin to drip down his cheeks. And he would have to say in broken syllables, I'm sorry, lads.

I'm sorry, lads. I cannot go on. It's too upsetting, lads, to think that such a dear divine Savior as that should suffer for us hell-deserving sinners like that.

And my friend added, Sometimes my dad would struggle on a bit, but I never once knew him to get right through Isaiah 53. Even if he managed to get beyond verses five and six, he never got beyond verse seven. He is led as a lamb to the slaughter.

It broke him down, said my friend. It broke him down every time to think that the Son of God should suffer for us like that. And dear fellow Christians, in the deepest sense of the word, can you and I ever get beyond that seventh verse? He, the Creator of stars and systems and eons, the uncreated Firstborn and Heir of all the universe, of the whole creation in whom all things cohere, the delight of the Father's boundless bosom, He is led as a lamb to the slaughter and dies in naked shame on that cross.

Can any Christian heart ever get over that as long as eternity lasts? Those nail-torn hands and feet are more marvelous to us than twice ten billion stars. Those calvary scars of Jesus shine with a lovelier luster than all the flacking gems of the New Jerusalem. Was I shouting a bit then? Friends, I don't think I am particularly sentimental.

Am I? I... maybe I hope I am. There's a big difference between sentiment and mere sentimentalism. From the latter may all of us be continually saved.

I'm not just roving in the realm of sentimentalism, but I'm uttering godly sentiment when I wear my heart on my sleeve for a moment and say this, I don't know what the bliss of heaven or the flashing glories of the New Jerusalem will be, but brothers and sisters, I think the thing I look forward to most is to seeing those nail marks in His dear hands and feet. I would love to kiss them. Don't you feel the same? Say yes.

As we bring the eye of a telescope or the lens of a camera into clear focus upon some object, so the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah sets the Lamb in clear focus as the center point. There it is between those two sevens expressing vicarious atonement, first from the human and then from the divine side. Let me repeat, that is only another way of saying that the Holy Spirit has put the Lamb there.

There is no soul-saving message for sinners apart from the Lamb, and no man is truly preaching the Christian gospel who leaves out the Lamb or makes Him anything other than the vital center. In these days, much so-called Christian scholarship and preaching sneers with fancied intellectual superiority at the idea of salvation through, quotes, the blood. Much that goes under the name of Christianity among our Protestant denominations nowadays is a new version of the Cain religion, which wants to worship God with bouquets of flowers and fruits, but refuses the sacrificial Lamb of propitiation and atonement.

I agree there is a kind of humanistic elegance about it, but it has no confession that the members of Adam's fallen race are judgment-deserving sinners needing redemption and regeneration. God rejects it.

And what is more, it leaves sinful man fundamentally unchanged.

Cain would not lure himself to shed the blood of a poor little Lamb. It was too cruel. But the man who was too compassionate to slay the Lamb murdered his own brother.

And if you want to know what religion without the Lamb does, look around at the pitiful wreck of morals and decencies in Christendom today. My reading of church history has shown me conclusively that whenever the church has ceased to preach the blood and has just preached morals, morality has tragically declined. But wherever the church has preached the Lamb and the precious blood, the vilest of the vile have been lifted from the gutter of iniquity and transformed into sanctified saints.

Let there be no apology for our preaching of the Lamb. Instead of secretly wondering whether we are preaching something outmoded or no longer relevant, let the desperate moral breakdown today be a new call to us to uplift the Lamb more than ever as the vital center of the only gospel which truly saves. I get rather tired, Mr. Chairman and friends, of hearing today that we are witnessing the failure of Christianity and are now passing into a post-Christian era.

Nothing of the kind. What we are seeing today is the pathetic failure of an apostate form of Christianity which has preached another gospel, a mere imitation all over Protestant Christendom, a glib and glossy-looking gospel with a Bible denuded of its infallible authority and Jesus who is a lofty humanitarian rather than God incarnate and a cross which was a human blunder rather than a divine atonement and a gospel of social ethics rather than of eternal salvation and moral transfiguration for the individual human being. Brethren, the one deep, dire, stark reason why the incarnate Son of God hung on that cross as the Lamb is this, that there is a Gehenna on the other side of the grave, a Gehenna where human souls are lost.

Lost. Lost. If Gehenna is a fiction, then the cross of Calvary is a superfluity.

You can't explain that cross apart from that fearful Gehenna. Does somebody say, Ha ha, but educated people don't believe today that sin is sin. Nor do they believe in a life beyond the grave.

Don't they? Well, not so long since I read an article in an American magazine about a conference of psychologists and psychiatrists in America. At that conference, statistics were revealed which said, if I get the figure correctly, that with over 80% of the people who go for psychiatric treatment, the two most poignant problems are a guilt complex because of sin and a fear of what lies on the other side of the grave. Brethren, despite all the fluffy, flimsy talk about modern man not believing in sin or in an hereafter, the two monster problems which plague the human mind and conscience are a condemning sense of sin and a dark fear of death.

The non-Christian religions have no answer. There is only one religion in the world that says, The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin. Modern philosophy says God is dead.

Human conscience says He was never more alive. Secular psychology says sin is no more sin. Human conscience says sin is as sinful as ever.

And the deepest cry of the human heart is not for a sociologist but for a Savior. Deep, deep down, sinful men and women know they need the Lamb. And one thing which may well encourage us today, brethren, is that all over America and in other countries too, and I seem to find suggestions of it in our beloved little Britain, there is a new interest in the Bible.

Men are getting finally disillusioned with new and false Gospels. They are groping around to find the truth that really saves. And the one place where they'll find it is in the Lamb.

Now let me look at my watch. Yes. I think I've about come to the end of my notes.

Or have I? Let me see. I think I'd like to leave you with this final thought. With the rise of the Wellhausen and Tuebingen and other German-originated schools of the rationalistic type of higher criticism, the Book of Isaiah became turned into a patchwork from a multiplicity of authors.

Some years ago when I was making a rather intensive study of Isaiah and looked up to see what the men of scholarship were saying, I found that some of those German brethren had discovered no less than 77 Isaiahs. And one extraordinarily educated scholar who wanted to excel all his brothers in this quasi-science of biblical vivisection discovered that there were no less than 123. What an achievement of biblical exegesis.

In more recent times we have come back to somewhat more sobriety and in any case the spade of the archaeologist has knocked the bottom out of the German-originated rationalistic theories into which, however, we will not go now. But the popular idea today is that the Book of Isaiah is in two main parts. And the first part is allowed by the authentic Isaiah, the most brilliant penman in Hezekiah's guild of literary experts.

But the second part of Isaiah, chapters 40-66, is supposedly from a so-called deutero-Isaiah. Now, just as it was with all these other supposed authors of different parts of Isaiah, they were all a lot of nameless anonymities, never heard of in history until the fertile imaginations of the critics invented them. So it is with deutero-Isaiah.

Nobody's ever found out who he was or where he lived. Anyway, they've christened him deutero-Isaiah. Now, Mr. Chairman and friends, I would like to submit that if we had been more careful in our study of the literary structure of this prophecy of Isaiah, we would never for a minute have doubted the unity of its authorship.

To be strict about it, the book is not in two parts, it's in three. Part 1 consists of chapters 1-35 and is one long catena of connected prophecies. Chapters 1-35.

But chapters 36, 37, 38, and 39 are neither prophecy nor poetry. They are prose and history. And the first two of those four chapters refer to Assyria, the now declining world power.

And the remaining two concern Babylon, the newly rising world power. And then, beginning at chapter 40, you have prophecy and poetry again. One long unbroken messianic poem, 27 chapters from chapters 40 to 66.

27, of course, because 40 is included. Now, how can I put it very, very synoptically? Run through the first part, the first 35 chapters. The first six chapters are all limited to Judah.

Then Isaiah has a wonderful vision of the throne of thrones, the sovereign, glorious Jehovah, king of all history and decider of all destiny. And after those first six chapters on Judah, you have another six chapters on Judah and Israel. Then you expand and you have another group of ten chapters on the ten greatest nations of antiquity.

And then you come to the next group of chapters and they are on the whole of history, right to the end of the present age. Have you noticed that? And then you come to a group of four chapters, all on Jerusalem, which is ever the center point of God's controversy with Adamic humanity. And then you have, after that, two chapters reaching right to the end of the present age, and you're in the Great Tribulation.

And then you come to the last chapter, chapter 35, and at last you're in the Millennium. The ransomed of the Lord return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing flee away. Do you tell me all that's by accident? First six chapters, Judah, then Judah and Israel, then the ten great nations of antiquity, then on all the nations of the world, then on all the centuries of the present age, then the Great Tribulation, and then out into the Millennium.

I'm not going to believe all that's by accident. And then when you come to part three, that is chapters 40 to 66, those 27 chapters are quite obviously divided into three groups of nine each. In the first nine, you have the supremacy of Jehovah.

And in the next group, you have the servant of Jehovah. And in the final group, you have the salvation of Jehovah. Now, at the end of the first nine, that's at the end of chapter 48, you'll find this divisive refrain, There is no peace, saith Jehovah to the wicked.

When you come to the end of the next nine, chapter 57, there it is again, There is no rest, saith my God, for the wicked. And when you come to the end of the third nine, the end of the whole prophecy, you have that again in amplified form. The fire is not quenched and the worm never dies.

So the middle chapter of the middle nine is Isaiah 53. And at the middle of the middle chapter of the middle nine, you've got this, He is led as a lamb to the slaughter. Now, in the first catena of prophecies, 1 to 35, the key chapter is chapter 6. And in that long messianic poem, chapter 40 to chapter 66, the key chapter is Isaiah 53.

All right? Here's the wonderful thing. If you turn to the twelfth chapter of John, you'll find that in verse 41 it says this, These things spake Isaiah when he saw His glory. His glory.

He was seeing on that throne that glorious Being who having become incarnated in human flesh and blood, we now know as Jesus. He saw the pre-incarnate Christ on that flashing throne of holiness and sovereignty. And in Isaiah 53, Isaiah was stunned and shocked.

It broke him. He saw that same wonderful Being whom he had seen on that throne. He saw Him hanging on that cross.

Are you getting it? Say yes. Oh, that was the thing that startled and shook the prophet, that the One who sat on that throne of sovereignty and holiness was the One who hung in tears and blood on that never-to-be-forgotten cross. Oh, hallelujah, what a Savior.

Yes, amen. Oh, and I'll have to say amen. Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood Shall never lose its power Till all the ransomed church of God Be saved to sin no more.

E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream Those flowing wounds supply, Redeeming love has been my theme And shall be till I die. Then, in a nobler, sweeter song, I'll sing Thy power to save With sinless heart And raptured tongue In triumph for the grave. Amen.

Aren't you just thrilled with the Word? And aren't you just more thrilled with the Lamb? I don't know about you, but I just want to go away somewhere and worship that Lamb. Shall we pray? Our Savior God, our hearts have been stirred this morning as we have had the Lamb ministered unto us. And we ask now that in our lives and in our hearts, in our wills, in our devotions, the Lamb may be the central figure, that He may be there upon our personal throne, that we may bow to Him.

Oh, can you take the likes of us and turn us into His glorious image who, grant by Thine infilling Spirit, we may know this experience as Your Word is written in our hearts and across our lives. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus, of the Lamb, be with us all. Amen.

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