
The Lamb of God

Rev. James Hamilton, D.D.

FROM THE INHERITANCE OF OUR FATHERS
—Series XXXIV, No. 12

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James Hamilton (1864–1867) was born in Paisley, Renfrewshire, on November 27, 1814. His father, William Hamilton, D.D. (1780–1835), was a prominent evangelical author and minister in the Church of Scotland. James graduated MA from Glasgow University in 1835 and also attended university classes at Edinburgh under Thomas Chalmers. He served briefly as a city missionary under Robert Smith Candlish, then as an assistant minister in Abernyte, Perthshire. He was ordained in Edinburgh in 1841 and shortly thereafter was called to serve at the National Scotch Church, Regent Square, in London.

An acquaintance of Robert Murray M'Cheyne and Andrew Bonar, Hamilton sided with the Free Church in the Disruption of 1843. His church ministry was successful but somewhat limited by weakness of voice. He also gave himself to writing and editing, where his intellectual and spiritual endowments shone. In 1848 the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) awarded him the Doctor of Divinity degree.

Never very strong, Hamilton fell ill in the summer of 1867 and died in his home on November 24. His *Works* (1869–1873) were published in six volumes.

The Lamb of God

The next day John seeth Jesus coming into him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!

—John 1:29

“The sin of the world!” Sin? What is sin?

You see that holy law? Radiant with God’s own purity, and bright with a divine benignity, it stands on earth a pillar of light and glory, a specimen of God to tell us that He Himself is holy, just, and good. And sin defaces that monument, dilapidates it, and casts filth on what it cannot destroy.

You see that God of love? Bending over an earth fresh fashioned and beaming on it those looks of complacency which hallow while they bless; and behold Him concentrating those regards of love and

joy on His own image, man, which was hailed, "Very good"—and presently see man shaking the fist of defiance, and darting the glance of estrangement and hostility at the God of Love, and you see another aspect of sin.

Look to this man, made up of divers lusts and passions! Pride, ambition, envy; vanity, resentment, anger; covetousness, license, cruelty—these, and many evil appetites and emotions besides, flow through all his nature in fierce and malignant currents, and are his very being's poisoned blood and fevered pulse. They break out in oaths and curses, in execrations and blows of violence, in debauchery and riot; in spoken falsehood and acted lies, in words of lewdness and deeds of shame; in the sanctuary forsaken, the Bible tossed aside, and prayer neglected or shammed over. And when, goaded by conscience, he makes an effort to amend—when, to clear the cloud from affection's brow or recon-

cile him to himself, he makes a desperate struggle and seeks to rend off some besetting sin, he finds he cannot. This evil habit he cannot tear away; for, like the poisoned mantle, it has grown into himself, and to tear it off is to tear fibers and nerves asunder and to lacerate the quick and quivering flesh. This guilty affection he cannot pluck out, for his heart is at its roots, and nature could not stand the self-divulsion; and in this pervasive canker, this virulent and festering plague, you see sin in its malignity.

And look to this pure region, this holy paradise or radiant heaven. And what is this blot on the brightness, this shadow on the splendor? What is it which attracts so many eyes in wonder, and repels them again in horror? What is it they are expelling in amazement and disgust? Rather, what is it which, abashed and self-conscious, expels itself? What is that object which, from under Jehovah's burning eye, dark and dastardly, slinks away to its own place,

and Eden again is bright, and heaven again is holy? What is it which, when confronted with infinite sanctity, would fain seek refuge in the deepest cavern of the pit, and from a region of light and elevation would gladly flee to hide its hideousness and pollution in the dungeon of despair?

Words cannot paint it. It is only in the light of the great white throne, or by the flames of hell, or in the revealing light of the Holy Spirit, that any one can see the real character of sin. It is the enemy of God. It is the transgressor of His law. It is the great soul-poison and heart-plague. It is the only thing which really defiles or deforms the man. It is pollution, misery, guilt, incipient hell. It is the only thing to which we can give, in its fullest sense, the emphatic name of evil.

But just as sin is our earth's great burden and humanity's deforming blot, the design of the Incarnation was to do away this mighty evil for a goodly number. For this

end the Son of God was manifest, that He might destroy the works of the devil; and in the case of a multitude whom no man can number, the Savior finished transgression and made an end of sin. And though here He is called the Lamb of God, there is one aspect in which the Lamb was wrathful and His strength was leonine. There was one vindictive feeling which, like an oven, burned in His holy bosom, and one object toward which He was filled with exterminating fury. On sin He could not look without abhorrence, and the sight of that cursed thing which had insulted His heavenly Father and filled a happy world with woe and horror kindled His zeal and revenge; and whilst the Lamb's gentleness encouraged the sinner, the Lion's fury still flashed upon the sin.

Isaiah 63:1–5 says, “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his

strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. But wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me, and my fury, it upheld me."

But while it is important to remember that in Immanuel's bosom throbbed and swelled a purpose, not heroic only, because it was divine—while sworn to vindicate the perfections of the Godhead, and magnify the law—while darting an eye of annihilating hatred at sin, and through all the storm of intervening anguish borne sublimely by foreseeing the

travail of His soul, and that new earth in which righteousness dwelleth—while the soul of the Redeemer was inwardly sustained by these big emotions and glorious prospects, His most obvious aspect was the one in which John the Baptist hailed Him—meek, gentle, and innocent, and doomed to suffer. No, for the sake of the one it was needful that He should become that other; it was only in lamb-like guise that Ariel, the Lion of God, could fulfill His lofty purposes.

Consistent with God's wisdom and justice, it would appear that there is only one way to dispose of sin. It can only be ended by an exhaustive expiation, by the sinner or his substitute making full atonement for it. And as man could not atone, the Son of God undertook the atonement Himself. He assumed the nature which had sinned, all except sinfulness. He was formed in fashion as a man; and though He renounced no inherent perfection (for every attribute

of wisdom, power, and knowledge would be needed in the work given to Him to do), He veiled them and held them in abeyance, and as He moved about in Joseph's dwelling, and by and by in the streets of Jerusalem and on the hills of Galilee, seldom did anything meet the view except a very holy and benignant being. Though engaged about His Father's business, hitherto that business was mainly a fulfilling of all righteousness; few suspected that He was bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows. And it was not until very near the close of His life that the Savior's character revealed itself as His people's sin-bearing substitute. In the greatness of His love, He had volunteered to make reconciliation for the transgressors, and the time was now come for testing the powers of that ancient love. Just as when wrath began to sparkle in the old world's atmosphere, it was the signal for every creature which Jehovah had selected to seek the ark of refuge, so

now, and in a very different way, when the hour of darkness came, it was the signal for the sins of all God's chosen to seek the victim of God's ordaining. One by one, myriad by myriad, they came, dark and dismal, and settled down on Immanuel's holy soul. A fearful hour to Him! Harmless and undefiled, He had never known sin except afar off, and now the sins of an elect world were counted to Him and accumulated on Him. Abraham's lie and Moses' anger, Manasseh's sin who made Jerusalem run with blood, and David's who made God's enemies blaspheme, the sins of all the saved from Abel to the end of time, came in murky flight and swarmed and clustered round the Savior's pure and spotless soul. And as they well-nigh shut out the Father's love and the sight of accustomed heaven, that soul began to be exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. But unutterably dear to heaven as the beloved of the Father was, He was bearing the sins of many, and now or

never must be made an end of sin. As punishment alone can expiate sin, the vials of indignation burst and on the Lamb of God they poured a momentary hell. "Father, if it be possible!" "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But the work was done, the wrath was borne, the penalty was paid; and emerging from the flood of fiery wrath the Surety rose exulting and flew back to the Father's bosom; but the sin was never found again. It was finished, drowned, dissolved; it was atoned for and annihilated. Transgression was finished. An end was made of sin.

It was to this truth that God turned the eye of His ancient people through many types or pictorial lessons. For instance, every morning and evening in the temple, the nation sacrificed a lamb, and at the great yearly festival, the Passover, every family selected from the flock a lamb without blemish and, having performed various rites, they slew it and

sprinkled on the door-posts and lintels its blood. Doubtless with that acuteness which personal solicitude produces, or rather with that sagacity which the Holy Spirit imparts, many a wistful eye saw deep significance in the familiar symbol, and when he viewed the fairest and most spotless selected from the fold, separated from its companions, and conducted away from bright pastures where it had always rejoiced, and shut up in captive loneliness in the priest's or poor man's chamber, and then in silent innocence and uncomplaining meekness led forth to the altar, and then on its harmless head his own or his country's sin confessed, and the gleaming knife next moment soaking in its blood—in this process of obvious substitution and vicarious suffering intelligent piety must have glimpsed some better thing to come. But what enlightened devotion might have surmised, the sure word of prophecy revealed; in words which scarcely needed

a gospel to countersign or a Philip to interpret, Isaiah expounded the whole: "All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted; yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered

with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:6–12).

And now, when John the Baptist, after fifteen centuries of Passovers and on the very eve of the last of them, saw the one who in His Person was the isthmus of two economies, the final link between the law and the gospel, he exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God!" There were not only the two disciples who forsook John and followed Jesus, but all who heard were put on the tiptoe of expectation; whether they acted as Andrew and his comrade did and arose to go see, they at least understood the allusion when John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"

Having thus stated what sin is and what Jesus has done to take it away, I would now conclude by repeating and enforcing the Baptist's exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

1. Behold Him and trust Him. "Without shedding of blood is no remission"; and a soul taught of God is content that it should be so. Such a soul sees grandeur in God's law and a luster in God's justice and truth. Much as it may covet pardon, thankful as it might be for a right to heaven, it would not wish to steal into heaven, nor receive a pardon which made God a liar. No, let God be true though all mankind should perish; let the law be magnified, though the avenging bolt should burn the universe. And to such a soul it is relief unspeakable when it sees "mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other"—when it learns that for the remission of sin blood has been already shed, a blood which cleanseth from all sin, even the precious blood of God's own Son, as of a lamb without blemish. If any of you should this day be uneasy or anxious; if you wish to come to the Lord's table but are hindered by the sense of guilt; if you are saying, "I

wish to come to the Lord's table. I would like to join those who are keeping up the remembrance of redeeming love. How glad would I be to sit down with those to whom He says: 'Eat, O friends; drink abundantly, O beloved'; but I doubt if I dare. The iniquity of my heels encompasseth me about. I find something arresting me, and drawing me back, and whispering: 'How dare you?' I find my sin a weighty burden too heavy for me. It crushes me down so that I cannot arise. It is gone over my head, so that I cannot look up." But look here, look to the Lamb of God. Look to Jesus and be lightened. Lay your sins on a sin-atoning and sin-extermimating Savior. Behold the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world, and see if He cannot bear yours away. And however heavy the burden of the past, and however depressing the body of sin, keep looking unto Jesus, and you will sooner or later find relief.

But if there be any among you to whom

the Lamb of God has no recommendation and the cross of Christ no attraction, how can you escape if you neglect so great salvation? It does not matter which way it be. Perhaps you deem your sin so trivial that you yourself can put it away; or perhaps you think it so terrible that it will need all your best efforts, all your watchfulness, prayers, and repentance for years to come to make you sure of salvation. Whichever it be, you are not looking to the Lamb of God. In the one case you feel that you are not bad enough to need Him; in the other, you think yourself too bad for Him to save you. But in either case you deem yourself wiser or stronger than God—wiser, if you know another name by which men can be saved, except Jesus Christ—stronger, if you think that you can work out a better righteousness than the righteousness of God. "The justice of the Deity," as a great thinker has said it, "not to be propitiated by any other means, pursues the trans-

gressor over earth, and in hell; nothing in the universe can arrest it in its awful career until it stops in reverence at the cross of Christ." There, under the cross, is the sinner's sanctuary—there, my hearers, is the place for you and me. The first smiling look we shall get from God will be when looking unto Jesus; the first time that we shall experience the alacrity of a lightened conscience, the relief and elasticity of the great life-burden lifted off, will be when we have laid our sins on the Lamb of God.

2. Behold Him, and love Him. In the estimate we form of others we are apt to be influenced by the opinion of the best judges—those who have the largest opportunity of observation and the greatest powers of discernment. Here on earth we are subject to many disturbing influences and are apt to admire or scorn, love or hate, very much as caprice may dictate or some casualty determine; but while our

views are narrow and our leanings partial, there is a world where all judge righteous judgment, and see as they are seen. What, then, with their loftier powers and larger observation, do spirits made perfect think of Jesus Christ? While He Himself was still on earth, He saw that, with all their veneration, His disciples had not discovered Him. They admired Him, but they scarcely adored Him; they loved Him, but they were not lost in Him; so it was one of His last prayers, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

Well, then, in the very place where Jesus is, what do they think of Him, and what is thought by those who best can judge? "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and cried with

a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9–10). And just as His service is rapture, so His society is the sunshine of the place, the meat and drink of its inhabitants. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 7:16–17). But higher than spirits made perfect are the angels who excel in strength. If there be intellect more expanded, character more holy, affections more intense, and tastes more pure anywhere in the universe than what are found among the sons of men, they must be sought among these sons of God; and it is quite conceivable that objects which awaken our astonishment may be obscure or insignificant to capacities so transcendent as the principal-

ties and powers in heavenly places. How then do these high natures deem of Jesus Christ? Why, all their superiority only gives the power of superior wonder. The marvels of Christ's person and work the angels desire to look into, and when God was manifest in flesh it was their privilege to see, their promotion to minister. When the Father introduced the only-begotten into the world, He said, "And let all the angels of God worship him"; "and I," says John, "heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:10–12). And when the Son of man appears at last in His glory, He is to bring as His satellites all the host of heaven—all the holy angels with Him.

If the Lamb of God thus receives the

highest homage and deepest love of all the loyal minds and holy in wide immensity—if of all that is august and amiable, majestic and gracious, they concede to Him the most glorious palm—if of all that is worthy their own verdict and eager voice be, “Worthiest is the Lamb,” there is only one Being in the universe more competent to judge, and His judgment is absolute.

With full knowledge of all possible perfection and with the wide universe inviting His complacency and open to His choice, what does God Himself think of Jesus Christ? Before He ever quitted the bosom of the Father, He was always His delight, rejoicing before Him, and no less His delight when here. In the veil of flesh and busy in this work of atonement, the voice from heaven again and again saluted Him, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.” Yes, brethren, among all the beholders of the Lamb of God, there was no eye which beheld

Him more complacently than Jehovah's own, and, whatever you may think of Him, there is no object in the universe so glorious in the Father's view, nor so dear to the Father's heart, as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

Oh brethren, do you love Him also? If you beheld Him from that point of view from which the redeemed in glory see Him, you would love Him. If you saw the glories of His person as holy angels see them, you would love and adore Him; and if you saw Him as God Himself beholds Him, you would be filled with ineffable complacency towards Him; He would be your delight. And if you do not love Him whom all the saved and all the sinless love, if your affection is not drawn towards Him who has long since riveted to Himself the heart of a holy universe, there must be something wrong with you. But brother, there is a reason why you should love Him which angels and saints

in glory have not. They are safe, but you are not; and if ever you get to glory, the Lamb of God must take you there. You are a sinner, and Jesus is the friend of sinners.

All ye that pass by,
To Jesus draw nigh:
To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?
Your ransom and peace,
Your surety He is;
Come, see if there ever was sorrow like His.

For what you have done
His blood must atone;
The Father hath punished for you His dear Son.
The Lord in the day
Of His anger did lay
Your sins on the Lamb, and He bore them away.

He dies to atone
For sins not His own;
Your debt He hath paid, and your work He
hath done.
Ye all may receive
The peace He did leave,
Who made intercession, "My Father, forgive."

3. Behold Him and follow Him. "The next day John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.'" One of them was Andrew, the other is supposed to have been the Evangelist John himself. They first followed Jesus as inquirers. There were points on which they were perplexed. There were some questions which they longed to ask. They wanted more information, fresh data on which to make up their minds. But they had not courage to accost Him. He was a stranger, and one whom their master revered. But Jesus soon showed Himself to be the Lamb of God. Instead of making Himself shy to them or waiting until they should hail Him, He turned about and gave them the opportunity they wished. "What seek ye?" "Rabbi, where dwellest thou?" "Come and see." Should any among yourselves be in the

mind of Andrew and John, wanting information, wanting light—confused and embarrassed, wishing to know Christ—be not afraid. Go to His servants; go to His ministers; go to His book; but above all, go to Him. He will not quench the smoking flax; if you desire to turn to Him, then to you, oh inquirer, He says, “Come and see.” They went and abode with Him that night, and the next we hear of them is that they are open disciples, following Him in public and in full daylight, and bringing others to Him.

If you really learn what Jesus is, if you go and see, you too will follow. Gratitude, love, and admiration will make you open disciples; whether it be in the sanctuary or in civil life, in a station high or low, where you meet with fellow-Christians or find yourself alone, in the workshop or the drawing room, in the camp or the barrack, at college or at school, the language of your affectionate discipleship and frank

consistency will be—"I'm not ashamed to own my Lord." And then from earnest inquirers and open disciples, you will become devout imitators; and just as the blood of the Lamb grows dearer as the ground of your hope and the price of your pardon, so will Christ's lamb-like spirit and demeanor grow more and more attractive to your admiring love. You will strive to copy His *gentleness*. He did not strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets, and in moments of provocation you will pray, "Oh Lamb of God, calm the perturbation of my angry spirit." You will long to possess His *guilelessness* and *innocence*. He did no violence, neither was guile found in His mouth, and you will feel that, until your character be "simplicity and godly sincerity," you are very different from the sincere and simple Lamb of God. As the most blessed distinction you covet here below, you will pray to be made holy, harmless, undefiled, and

separate from sinners. And you will not forget His *meekness* towards men and His *submissiveness* to God. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; and after Christ's example, you will not always be apologetic and exculpatory, nor when they lay to your charge things that you knew not will you feel as if a new thing had befallen you; and when some sore trial or stunning grief comes down, may the angel Jehovah strengthen you to say, "Father, glorify Thy name. If this cup may not pass from me except I drink it, Thy will be done."

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