

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on John 1:29-41 on January 15th, 2016 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Aha!

Today's Focus: The Lamb of God

“You Can Stop Carrying What Jesus Carried Away”

Hello everyone, it's so good to be back with you even though after church last Sunday someone thought to text me a picture of the church sign reading zero degrees right as Sarah and I were coming back from Florida! But I bring you greetings from some of our dear Builders For Christ friends like Robert and Jeri Browning from Texas and Don and Carolyn Miner from Michigan whom we got to see at the Christian Leadership Experience down in Orlando. They're incredible ambassadors for our church even though they don't live around here. But they sure treasure the relationships and experiences they had here with you.

So last week Sarah and I were going through the airport with a group from the Milwaukee area. Everybody had their luggage, their backpacks, their bags. And a couple people had more than that even because they were going down to Orlando bringing their gear or promotional displays. There was a videographer in the group who had tripods and different sized camera attachments each with its own special bag. And then there were some folks like my friend, Jeff, one of the architects for our ministry center. He was going down to Orlando to set up a promotional display for the ministry exhibit so he had all this awkward stuff to bring along like an oversized tube and a large bin on wheels. We had some good laughs about all the stuff we were collectively carrying around and bringing with us down to Orlando.

Friends, what have you been carrying around with you? What did you bring with you to church today? Got any baggage? Perhaps the still fresh memories of insensitive or spiteful words that you spoke this week. Maybe you brought your hard heartedness—your slowness to admit your own flaws or your unwillingness to forgive someone else's. Perhaps you had a hard time coming in the doors today because of your massive ego or maybe you came in carrying a backpack full of all kinds of various insecurities. Perhaps you brought your suitcases full of reasons why you don't think you really need church because you're actually a really good person...even though your whiny, immature and selfish actions this week would seem to say you're not that good. Perhaps your overwhelming sense of guilt or shame, a gnawing in your gut that won't go away because no one knows what you thought about doing, what you did, or what you enjoyed...except God. Got any awkward stuff that you're embarrassed about which you're trying hard to ignore but which is obvious to anybody who knows you? Friends, what if I said you could leave it all here and go home today feeling free? *What if you could stop carrying what Jesus carried away?*

In our sermon text today, we find ourselves along the Jordan river in a place called Bethany. It was a place where people had been going out to, traveling to, in order to see and hear and sometimes be baptized by a man named John. John the Baptist. Some people came with their honest spiritual curiosity. Some came with their questions—sometimes more like their accusations. Some came with their baggage. Their regrets. Their anger. Their failings and their fears. Their consciences all busted up. Their shame. Their insecurities and identity struggles. Their sins. Except on this day there came also someone else. Someone who had none of those things of his own but who instead came to carry everyone else's away for good. Our text says, ²⁹ **The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

In other words, “Aha! God’s Lamb.” Do you sense how enormous this truth is? I mean you talk about an Aha! moment, friends! But to understand what’s going on here we need to step back in time as best we can. You see it might take a bit for all this to sink in for you and that’s ok. I’m sure it must have taken a while for the enormity of it all to completely sink in for John’s original audience too. But for those who were there that day, who saw John point to Jesus, who heard his words...their Aha! process would’ve gone something like this:

“Every morning. Every evening. All those years. All those lambs sacrificed at the temple. And all those Passover meals. Unblemished lambs. Their innocent blood shed. Every one of those lambs slaughtered with no end in sight. Our fathers told us it’s because we too deserve to die as punishment for our sins. Sin is that serious. Without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness. So those lambs paid the ultimate price, each one playing a part. But what if these sacrifices were only meant to foreshadow what the future Messiah would accomplish in full? What if this person right here that John is pointing to is God’s Lamb whose sacrifice will put an end to all those sacrifices once and for all? What if this is the Lamb whose sacrificial death would be the just penalty for all humanity? What if Jesus is one who will take away the sin of the world and what if I too am part of the world and my spouse is part of the world and my neighbor is part of the world? O what love God must have for me by providing a sacrifice in my place!”

Friends, have you had an Aha! moment yet? Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—all the sins of every human person past, present, and future all bundled together as if in one large malignant mass which this Lamb carries away to the cross. How can this be? Well first of all because Jesus was completely and wonderfully perfect. He never sinned—no lustful thoughts or jealousy, no little white lies, no disrespecting his parents, no moral compromises to win someone’s favor, no thinking he was better or more deserving than another, never failing to put the needs of others before his own.

You know where Jesus had been shortly before this story? Out in the desert for 40 days. Any of you remember what he was doing out there? Being tempted, fiercely tempted by the devil himself. The Bible records how the devil tried to get Jesus to give in with temptations customized to sabotage Jesus’ messianic mission—to get him to doubt his Father’s love and care, to get him to grab earthly glory, and to try and get him to simply choose an easier path through life. The devil tried to get Jesus to skip that dreadfully inconvenient and painful encounter with the cross. To think selfishly and comfortably and primarily for himself instead. But through Scripture and prayer and the blessings of the Holy Spirit that he received at his baptism, Jesus overcame! And he overcame as one of us. Human yet without sin. Jesus proved by word and deed in every facet of his life what God the Father himself proclaimed at Jesus’ baptism. Remember that? When Jesus was baptized by John, heaven opened, the Holy Spirit rested upon the eternally begotten Son, and the Father affirmed his identity with the words, *“This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.”*

This is why Jesus could carry the full weight of all our sins. True God while at the same true man, Jesus alone in all human history was uniquely qualified to be our substitute. When Jesus shed His blood on Calvary’s cross, his death was sufficient to make the payment for the sins of all people of all time. **“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”** This means that as Jesus’ flesh was tenderized and torn by flogging, he was paying for your hard heartedness and temper. As that crown of thorns was pressed into his head, Jesus was paying for every one of your sinful thoughts. As those nails were

pounded into his hands and feet Jesus was paying for every one of your sinful deeds. As he gasped for breath and finally gave it up, Jesus was paying for every time we sucked the life out of someone else with our harsh and demeaning words.

Jesus is the Lamb of God about whom the Apostle Peter says: **“¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”** (1 Pe. 1:18-9).

Now perhaps you're thinking, "What does this all mean practically in my life that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?" Well let me ask what's going to sound at first like a silly question. Any of you make a New Year's resolution to get in better shape? It's one of the most common resolutions, "I'm going to eat better, work out more, go to the gym" ...that sort of thing. So I've tried to go to the gym a little more consistently the last couple weeks. And wouldn't you know...apparently a few other people have had the same idea. The gym's been packed! Of course. But I'm just guessing...by February it won't be as busy. Why? Because human effort and resolve on its own almost always falls short. "Try harder" sounds like a good self-pep talk but only for a time. (The professionals in the fitness industry will tell you that you need to do something often enough that it becomes a habit and that to develop a habit you need accountability and group encouragement. That's just my free fitness advice.)

And yet this is how a lot of people view religion, isn't it? Like it's a self-improvement program that's based on your effort and performance. "Do better. Try harder. Be the best and God will bless you." Maybe you've tried this kind of thinking. Maybe you've failed at this. If you haven't yet, you will. And it's a terrible feeling when you do. I think in part that's why there's so much anxiety out there especially with teens and young adults. A whole generation right now is finding out that the real world isn't a place where people just give you a trophy for showing up. A whole generation is trying to figure out who they are if they can't be the best like they thought they could. Everybody's trying to deal with the reality that you don't just get what you want because you want it.



But what if you could stop carrying what you were never meant to carry? And what if you could stop carrying what Jesus carried away? {pic} A while back I saw this picture on Twitter and loved it so much I saved it. You know what the tweet's title was? "Life Without Grace." This is life without Jesus. It's what religion is like too without a right understanding of who Jesus is and what he's done. It's just a moral pep talk. A bunch of, "Try harder. Do better. Grow stronger. Better behavior. More effort. Stop screwing

around. Carry those burdens. Let's see some results. Come on, you can do it!" And the thing is, maybe you sort of can...for a time. You're determined. But eventually you'll wear out. On your own, you will fail. Miserably. Repeatedly. And when you do here's what happens. You are tempted to take weight off the bar, to ease up on God's righteous requirements, to minimize sin, and to make it easier for you so you can feel better about yourself. "See, look at me. I can lift *this*. I can carry *this*." Or else you will try and compare yourself to someone else who seems to be lifting less than you so that you can feel better about yourself. But remember, that doesn't work with God. Jesus didn't call us to play the comparison game of who's the best. He came to give us rest!

So here's an Aha! moment for you if you haven't had one yet. Jesus doesn't take the weight off the bar. He lifts the bar for you. Not with you. *For* you! That's what Jesus did in your place as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's what he did for you when he went to the cross. He sweat. He suffered. He bled. He died. He carried away the full weight of all your sins so that you are now completely forgiven.

So then here's the thing. If you understand how amazing God's grace is and what he's done for you—then doesn't it change how you look at others? When you see others struggling to lift the bar in life, a bar that's impossible for them to lift on their own, or other people...maybe even your own spouse struggling to carry the weight of guilt or shame or unrealistic expectations...the last you'll want to do is pile more weight on for them like the Pharisees who refused to repent and be baptized by John. And you don't have to help them find someone who's lifting less weight to make them feel better about themselves. You can point them to Jesus—"Look, the Lamb of God." You can help them stop carrying what Jesus already carried away. Let's pray...

Dearest Savior, for people who think they're good enough, grace is frustrating. But for people who know they're not good enough, grace is freeing. Thank you for setting us free from the crushing weight of our sins, our anxieties, our constant striving to measure up but always falling short. I pray that today we might all have a grace filled Aha! moment that your Spirit now sustains for the long haul. Help us to identify and let go of what you've already carry far away. Help us to remember that because of your sacrifice on the cross, even those sins I cannot forget...God says he cannot anymore remember. That is incredible. That is love. That is true. Receive my endless praise for you alone are worthy of it. Amen.