

Message from the Master, Broadcast Date: **June 1, 2008**

Sermon Series: Cast your Cares on Jesus

This Sermon: Cast your Guilt on Jesus (John 1:29)

Speaker: Forrest Bivens

It is said that Noel Coward, the well known playwright, as a prank, once sent an identical anonymous letter to 10 notable men in London. The note said, "We know what you have done. If you don't want to be exposed, leave town." Within 6 months, all 10 men that received the letter, moved! Now, that was a terrible prank, but it shows the awesome power of guilt. Guilt can be a horrible burden to bear. Guilt can make us feel insecure because we're always worried that someone is going to find out what we're really like, or what we've really done. Police officers will tell you that some of their biggest arrests were because they stopped someone for a minor violation and the person ran because they thought the police knew about a bigger crime. This phenomenon is described in Proverbs 28:1: "The wicked man flees though no one pursues." How would you or I have responded if we had received the note from Noel Coward that was mentioned earlier? Would we have moved? Can we say with certainty, "I wouldn't feel intimidated?" Think about the last time we looked into our rear view mirror and saw a police officer? Did we get a little anxious? Did the heart beat a little faster? Guilt is a powerful emotional stimulant and often a horrible burden to bear.

Guilt is actually more than that. It is a reality, a significant reality, in every one of our lives aside from our feelings. The word "guilt" may be used to describe an emotion or a feeling, but guilt is also the objective responsibility for having sinned and broken God's law. Guilt is our being accountable for our sins and liable for divine punishment. Regardless of our feelings, the guilt is real and a serious issue for every person.

How can we handle that? What can we do about this? The Word of God has the perfect answer or solution to our guilt. Last week we began a new sermon series with the title, "Cast your Cares on Jesus." This morning our specific focus is on the invitation to "Cast your guilt on Jesus!"

The Bible text chosen to guide us as we cast our guilt on Jesus is John chapter 1, verse 29: "*John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" In these words we find the perfect solution to our guilt. This verse sets before us a bold messenger who gave a bloody message that invites us to behold Jesus and receive great benefit.

Let us notice first of all that our Savior is revealed through John the Baptist, a bold messenger. John was the man whose birth was surrounded by the unusual and the miraculous. The angel Gabriel announced he would be born to elderly parents who had been childless all through their married life. While he was still a fetus within his mother's womb, John was influenced by the Holy Spirit in a remarkable way. John left parents and home rather early in life and lived in relatively desolate wilderness areas, ate locusts and honey for physical strength, and wore a garment made of a camel's hide and hair. By most standards of society, John was a wild man, and his voice and message were bold and aggressive. There was a no-nonsense, tell-it-like-it-is quality about his preaching. He spoke authoritatively and with picturesque, powerful language.

As the events of our text unfold, he and Jesus are about thirty years old. John sees Jesus coming toward him. Neither John nor Jesus probably looked very impressive, as people would normally see it. Both were likely thin, physically hard, and less than warm or inviting at first glance. And in our text we have this “wild man” in the wilderness pointing to a young carpenter – and speaking words that boldly claim to have worldwide significance. He calls to anyone and everyone to look at Jesus, to focus their attention on Jesus, and to behold him seriously. Bystanders might have considered this an expression of inflated ego or self-importance since it invited, almost demanded, people’s attention.

This bold message and invitation was also a bloody one. The words of John ring out, *Look, the Lamb of God.* In calling Jesus a “Lamb,” John was not referring to his being sweet, gentle, patient, pure or innocent. While all that was true, calling Jesus the Lamb was identifying him as the fulfillment of centuries of specific Old Testament promises. Many streams of divine prophecy converge here, with one great concept towering over all others. The Lamb was a sacrificial victim. Isaiah chapter 53 spoke of what Jesus would do with the words, *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.* The daily morning and evening sacrifices at the temple illustrated the same idea of lambs being slaughtered. These events, and many others, impressed on the mind of the Old Testament believers the truth that a substitute sacrifice was to serve as an agent of rescue through its blood. The ultimate truth was just as Abraham phrased it in Genesis 22: *God himself will provide the lamb, the sacrifice.* And there, coming toward John, was the Lamb of God, the divinely appointed sacrifice whose life would be taken, whose blood would be poured out. This bold message is very much a message of blood. And why, why specifically is this so?

John tells us to behold the Lamb of God *who takes away the sin of the world.* He does not say “sins” as though he was thinking of individual sins here and there, isolated from others and considered by themselves. He uses the singular, collective word “sin” and pictures the whole mass of human sin – all of your sins and my sins and everyone else’s sins – bundled into one huge, ugly entity that was transferred to Jesus and placed squarely on top of him. Do not ask me how this is possible. I simply know it is true – and I understand that because Jesus is eternal God as well as human sacrifice – he is able to have all sin and every ounce of the guilt of humanity loaded onto him. He is capable of receiving and bearing the sin of the world, because this Lamb is true God as well as true man and human being. And he is fully able to take away the sin of the world. He lifts them up and carries them away from us as far as the heavens are above the earth and as far as east is from west. This is more than a loving effort, noble but less than effective. Jesus takes away the sin once and for all. This is a bold and bloody message, but a message of hope and success at the same time.

I remember reading about a Christian airplane pilot who used to fly to the country of Zaire, Africa, on missions of mercy. One day he flew in with a brand new plane that replaced an older, less reliable one. The villagers gathered around the new plane, and suddenly two men approached carrying a live chicken, one holding onto the bird’s legs and the other its head. All of a sudden the chicken’s head and body were torn apart and the man with the flopping chicken corpse began swinging it around his head, spattering blood on the new plane, the pilot, and

everyone else. When the pilot asked what it all meant he was told that for generations spattered blood had signified an end to suffering, and the new plane promised that kind of hope for the people. In a parallel, graphic way the spattered blood may serve as a fitting reminder of the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, that was poured out to bring mankind a special hope and promise of better things. It is the blood that has effectively dealt with our guilt.

What are we to do with this bold message of blood? Remember that our overall theme is that we are to cast our guilt on Jesus. It does us no good at all to deny guilt or try to evade responsibility for our sins. Let us confess them and agree with God that we are truly guilty. As John the Baptist and Jesus did, let us take the matter of sin most seriously. The sin of the world includes the sin of you and me. Here is our deepest need. Despite so much in this world that remains pleasant and comfortable, there is still something very wrong between God and mankind that needs to be fixed. Sin must be atoned for, guilt must be removed, rebellion against God must be pardoned, and transgressions against God's will must be dealt with. Despite human attempts to bury this truth by indifference, denial, and neglect, our consciences still testify to the fact. More than education is needed here. Refinement of behavior, socially, politically or economically will not solve the problem either. The sin needs to be lifted up, taken away, and dealt with. John urges us to "behold" Jesus and to believe that he really does "take away the sin of the world." Behold, look at Jesus to see this. Behold and believe. And in this way let sin and guilt go! We are invited to shift our attention from ourselves and our guilt to Jesus Christ. And to say it once again, there we see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Senator Mark Hatfield once told this story about James Garfield who was elected President of the United States in 1880. Only six months in office, Garfield was shot in the back with a revolver. He never lost consciousness. At the hospital the doctor probed the wound with his little finger but couldn't find the bullet. In the days and months that followed, teams of doctors tried to locate the bullet, probing the wound over and over. In desperation they even called Alexander Graham Bell who was working on a little device called a telephone to see if he could locate the metal object in the president's body. He came, he sought, and he too failed. President Garfield hung on through July, through August, and in mid September he died – not from the original wound but from infection. The repeated probing which the doctors thought would help the man eventually killed him. In the same way, purely human attempts to remove sin and guilt, even when well intended, are going to fail and do not help the sinner's soul. It does us no good to dwell too long on our sin. The invitation is to release it to God, see it transferred in its entirety to Christ, and to know it is taken away. To see Jesus properly is to see his suffering and death as our Sin-bearer and to trust that this work of love is successfully finished.

A few verses after our text we read that John continued to repeat this message, "Look, the Lamb of God." There we are told that some of John's disciples heard this and immediately began to follow Jesus. They never stopped following Christ, but found in him satisfaction and salvation from their sin and guilt. Our privilege is to join them. Let us follow to listen, to learn, and to be assured that he takes away our guilt. Behold this bold message, this bloody message – this beneficial message that reveals our Savior to us. Then we shall behold the Lamb of God and believe the Lamb of God -- who takes away the sin of the world. Through that message we are led to cast our guilt on Jesus. And to be done with it.

Prayer: Almighty God, in mercy you sent your one and only Son to become one of us and to redeem us from sin and death. You designated him the sacrificial victim to atone for our sin and remove our guilt. You sent him to perform that task and now point us to him as our Savior. Lead and empower us by your Holy Spirit to understand and to rejoice in all that he is and all that he does for us. Enable us to speak boldly to others as well, inviting them to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Also hear us as we join to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.