

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

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CHAPTER SEVEN

"BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!"

"Among the ancient inscriptions and paintings on the tombs of the kings of Egypt one sees everywhere the symbol of the Key of Life. Strangely enough it is in the form of a cross. As we sat in our Round Tables we felt again and again, as in a flash, that the cross is the Key of Life, that here at the cross we saw into the depths of things; we felt that here the Heart of the Universe showed itself, and that if we could catch the Passion that beats here we would catch the meaning of Life itself.

"The riddle of CHRIST is to be found in His sacrificial spirit culminating in His Cross. To understand this is to understand CHRIST, to understand CHRIST is to understand GOD, and to understand GOD is to understand the meaning of the universe and of life. The Cross, then, is the Key. If I lose the Key in my hand and heart I know I hold its secret." -- E. STANLEY JONES in *CHRIST at the Round Table*.

An exile for CHRIST, who has laboured long among Mohammedans and poured out her soul for them, writes from her lonely post in Central Asia: *"We are learning here to put first things first and steer cautiously but persistently to our one aim. And I think we must do so in silence as to the outer world, in order to be able to do something in this inner world into which the Lord has placed us. We now have the freedom to witness for CHRIST, but it may any moment be taken from us, and so we must be careful to use it aright."*

May we not ask, as witnesses for CHRIST, what is that one aim, what is the heart of our message, the one indispensable truth which we must press home?

What is our distinctive, supreme, impelling message to the non-Christian world?

Is it not expressed in the words of John the Baptist, that harbinger of a new dispensation to Israel -- the Israel with which Islam has so much in common? That voice crying in the wilderness had one message: **"Behold the Lamb of God."**

John's freedom to witness for CHRIST was soon taken from him. Herod's cruel sword did its work; but while John had freedom, he put first things first. It was in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar; Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea; Herod ruled Galilee; Philip and Lysias had their tetrarchies; Annas and Caiaphas controlled the temple worship and the daily sacrifice. The Roman world was in revolution. There were many sects and parties and

philosophies, but they held out no living hope. Therefore the word of GOD came to John in the desert, and what he heard he cried:

"Behold the Lamb of God."

The words, Lamb of GOD, as a title of our Saviour, occur twice in the Gospel of John and once in Peter's First Epistle. But John uses the same title, although the word for lamb is in diminutive form (a little lamb) in the Book of the Revelation, no less than twenty-eight times.

A study of these passages will help us to understand how much this title meant to him who leaned on JESUS' bosom and knew the secret of His redeeming love perhaps better than any of the twelve apostles. It is in the witness of John the Baptist to the CHRIST that mention is first made of JESUS in these words: **"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29). The next day again, at Bethabara or Bethany beyond Jordan, **"Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!"** (John 1:35-36).

Peter does not use this title directly, but in speaking of our redemption from sin he says it was not with corruptible silver or gold **"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"** (I Peter 1:19).

In the vision of John on Patmos we are suddenly introduced (Revelation 5:5-6) to the LION of the tribe of Judah who is also the Lamb of GOD. **"And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth"** (vs. 6). The four and twenty elders fall down before this Lamb (5:8) and sing a new song in which ten thousand times ten thousand voices join: **"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing"** (vs. 12). All creation joins in the antiphonal response of glory to the Lamb.

Then we read that the Lamb opens one of the seven seals and GOD's judgments follow in swift succession, until men cry in terror, asking the very mountains to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (6. 16). But the redeemed, an innumerable multitude, stand before the throne and before the Lamb arrayed in white and sing His praise; for the Lamb in the midst of the throne is their SHEPHERD and GOD wipes away every tear (7:10, 17).

A little later we read how they overcame in the fight, against the accuser of the brethren, through the blood of the Lamb (12.11) and because their names were written in the Lamb's book of life (13.8).

Again we see the Lamb standing on Mount Zion (14:1) and the undefiled follow Him because they are the first fruits purchased from among men unto the Lamb (14.4); but those who worship the beast are tormented in the presence of the same Lamb (14:10). The victors sing the song of the Lamb (15.3) but the rebellious war against the Lamb (17.13) who also overcomes them, for He is the Lord of lords and King of kings.

After this we hear the voice of a great multitude in Heaven singing hallelujahs, for the marriage of the Lamb is come (19. 7). "**Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb**" (19. 9).

In the final chapters all the glory is given to the Lamb of GOD that taketh away the sin of the world. The holy city is "**the bride of the Lamb**"; the apostles are "**the apostles of the Lamb**"; the Lamb is the only Temple (21:22); and the Lamb is the only light of the city of glory (21:23). None can enter that holy place save those who are written in the Lamb's book of life (21:27). The river of the water of life proceeds from the throne of GOD and of the Lamb, for GOD's throne is the Lamb's throne (22.1-3); they shall see His face, and His name (the name of JESUS) shall be on their foreheads. "**Thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.**"

Who can resist the cumulative evidence from these passages that JESUS as the Lamb of GOD is the Saviour of sinners, the REDEEMER of the world, the King of Glory, the Supreme JUDGE, the RULER of the nations, one with the Father, in the essence of His being, the attributes of His power and the majesty of His dominion.

And all this was latent in the words that the Baptist first used by the banks of the Jordan when he saw the sinless Nazarene, numbered with the transgressors at His baptism, but crowned with glory and honour in the voice from Heaven: "**This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased**" (Matthew 3.17).

John surely did not use the words without being conscious of their significance to those who heard him. He was not speaking in riddles but alluded to the MESSIAH of type and prophecy; the SERVANT of JEHOVAH, in Isaiah 53, who bears the iniquity of us all and is led as a lamb to the slaughter.

To make the words refer to the gentleness and meekness of JESUS (as some modernists attempt to do in recent writings) without reference to His atoning sacrifice is doing violence to all the other parallel passages. As Godet remarks: "No doubt it was this contrast, vividly felt between himself and JESUS, which, amid all the Messianic designations which the Old Testament might have furnished him, led him to prefer this: "**The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.**"

It is remarkable that this title Lamb, under which the evangelist learned to know JESUS for the first time, is that by which the Saviour is designated preferentially in the Apocalypse. The chord which had vibrated at this decisive hour within the very depths of his being continued to vibrate within him to his last breath."

And the music of that chord was in harmony with CHRIST's own and earliest teaching; namely, that He came to give His life a ransom for others and that even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so the Son of Man would be lifted on the Cross for our redemption.

No other name of CHRIST occurs more frequently and repeatedly in the liturgies of the Churches:

"O Lamb of GOD: that takest away the sin of the world
Grant us Thy peace.
O Lamb of GOD: that takest away the sin of the world
Have mercy upon us."

In Dante's *Purgatorio*, voices are heard in unison chanting the same prayer for pardon:

"Only Agnus Dei were their preludes:
One word there was in all and measure one,
So that all concord seemed to be among them."

John the Baptist rivets attention to the person of CHRIST, "Behold!" using the singular number although many were present. Each one of us must look to JESUS individually for the removal of his own guilt, although He taketh away the sin of the world. **"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."**

JESUS of Nazareth had no regal robes or royal crown. He was the carpenter's son. But John beheld in Him the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

He is the Lamb of GOD. It is the genitive of origin and of possession.

GOD sent the SON and GOD loves Him. In this sacrifice it is not man who offers; it is GOD who gives His own, His very best.

Ecce Homo! said Pilate pointing to JESUS crowned with thorns, and the bruises of the scourging covered with a purple cloak. Ecce Agnus Dei! said John of JESUS just after his baptism and at the opening of His ministry. Behold the man who is the Lamb of GOD!

The world has beheld Him ever since; for He fills the horizon of history. He cannot be hid. But men gaze on Him and turn away, or gaze on Him and follow Him to the end. It is with deep insight that Studdert Kennedy describes JESUS as He appears to the modern world:

"He looks as contemptible as ever with His ragged rabble of a Church that shouts Hosanna on Sunday and runs from the Garden of Gethsemane on Friday; that protests like Peter and then betrays, that disputes who shall be greatest and thinks it is extravagant to wash men's weary feet; with His crowd of wretched parsons, poor human fools like me, who preach the Gospel and cannot lit it, who try to be loving and are not even amiable. He is as ridiculous as ever, just the same CHRIST that sat with a dirty purple horse-cloth on His bleeding back, and a crown of thorns set sideways on His head, with a mock sceptre in His hand, and the spittle of a drunken soldier rolling down His face, just the same CHRIST, but I am afraid of Him, as in his heart of hearts, I believe the modern man, the fiercest of the beasts of prey, is frightened of Him. He is disturbing, unnerving. He saps self-confidence and murders pride. He makes men want to go down upon their knees, and no strong man should do that except to the ALMIGHTY."

CHRIST is the Lamb which GOD provides as propitiation and sacrifice for sin.

In JESUS, as the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches so distinctly, we have fulfilment of all the Old Testament teaching concerning the blood that atones for sin.

Here is the great antitype to all the sacrificial ordinances and rites of humanity. The Lamb of GOD who is the desire of all nations.

Contrasting the glory of Mount Sinai and the giving of the moral law with the greater glory that is found for us in Mount Zion, the writer to the Hebrews comes to an astonishing climax. **"Ye are come,"** he writes, **"unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to THE BLOOD of sprinkling."**

How does the shedding of blood give remission of sin?
What is the origin of sacrifice?
Whence its universality?

Not only in the religion of the Semites but in the sacrificial rites of all nations we find three fundamental ideas in the propitiation, namely, substitution, satisfaction and sufficiency.

The same is true of the sacrifice of JESUS on the Cross. CHRIST died in our stead just as truly as the ram was the substitute for Isaac on Mount Moriah. CHRIST's death gave satisfaction for sin, appeased justice, purchased pardon, more than the blood on the lintel did when the avenging angel slew Egypt's first-born.

CHRIST's death is sufficient. He dieth no more. He made on the Cross by His one oblation "a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."

Trumbull, in his interesting study of the "Blood Covenant," gives an excellent summary of early Semitic teaching, with many parallels from the Old Testament, to show that to these people **"without the shedding of blood there was no remission of penalty and no peace of reconciliation."**

To understand what John meant when he called JESUS the Lamb of GOD, we must read the Old Testament Scriptures that are at the basis of all New Testament thought.

To take a single example from this wide realm of Semitic religious thought, we find in Islam a primitive custom, approved by Mohammed, and called the 'Aqiqa sacrifice. It is well-nigh universal, from Morocco to China, and is based on orthodox tradition. We read in tradition that Mohammed made the 'Aqiqa sacrifice not only for his two grandsons, Hasan and Husain, but for himself ('Aqiqa 'an nafsih). The prayer used to-day in this propitiating sacrifice of lamb or kid presented for the seven-day old child reads: --

"O God, this is the 'Aqiqa sacrifice of my son so-and-so, its blood for his blood, its flesh for his flesh, its bone for his bone, its skin for his skin, its hair for his hair. O God! make it a redemption for my son from the Fire, for truly I have turned my face to him who created heavens and the earth, a true believer. And I am not of those who associate partners with God. Truly my prayer and my offering, my life and my death, is to God, the Lord of the Worlds, who has no partner, and thus I am commanded, and I belong to the Moslems."

Among Moslems, as in the case of the Paschal lamb, not a bone of this sacrificial victim must be broken! It is John who refers to this detail in the fulfilment of prophecy at the time of the Crucifixion (John 19.36) for again he saw on Calvary "**the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.**"

The Gospel for the Moslem and for the non-Christian world is contained in that one short sentence.

The Cross of CHRIST is indeed the missing link in the Moslem creed.

The death of CHRIST, its necessity, its historicity, its implications, its results, its pathos and its power -- these things are hidden from the wise and prudent in the world of Islam, but GOD reveals them unto babes. When the inquirer comes to the Cross and sees the Crucified, he finds an answer to all his difficulties.

Mysticism in Islam at its best always failed to reveal the mystery of the Cross. This is the tragedy of many a soul's pilgrimage, ever pressing on without reaching the goal.

Ghazali, Sha'arani, Jalu-ud-din-ar-Rumi, Ibn-al-Arabi, and many other seekers after GOD, travelled a long and steep way. Their teaching of sin and repentance, forgiveness and the vision of GOD, contains much that may be used as a preparation for the Gospel, but it never rises to Calvary.

Here the Prodigal Son of Arabia utterly missed the road -- and in consequence led many astray. We too shall miss the road unless we follow the blood marks all the way from the earliest promise in Genesis to the foot of Calvary.

"The apostles," says Principal Forsyth, "never separated reconciliation in any age from the Cross and the blood of JESUS CHRIST. If we ever do that (and many are doing it to-day) we throw the New Testament overboard. The bane of so much that claims to be more spiritual religion at the present day is that it simply jettisons the New Testament and with it historic Christianity. The extreme critics, people that live upon monism and immanence, rationalist religion and spiritual impressionism, are people who are deliberately throwing overboard the New Testament as a whole, deeply as they prize it in parts."

When men speak of redeeming the old order of society or transforming life from sordidness into sainthood, without the Cross, they follow a forlorn hope.

We may well be optimists when we see GOD's purpose of grace for the world being accomplished. When we face new eras and new opportunities. But when John came preaching repentance, the fullness of time was also at hand.

Revolutionary changes were taking place in the whole Roman Empire and in the Jewish church. There had been much preparation.

There was great expectancy.

There was deep despair of the old order.

But John ushered in the new epoch by proclaiming a new Redemption:

"Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

It is a redemption of the old order that we desire, but it must be redemption by the Blood.

The Cross of CHRIST is the only hope of the world. Our constant danger is that we cry, Behold this new opportunity. Behold our new methods. Behold our human-brotherhood, and forget to cry, **Behold the Lamb of GOD!**

There is a remarkable painting of CHRIST on the Cross as the only hope of the world; it startlingly depicts in vivid colours something of the universality and efficacy of the atonement in a way that cannot be forgotten. The story of the picture is as follows : -- Blater Heroni, who was president of the Mixed Court at Adis Ababa in Abyssinia, received his education in a Swedish mission school. He also prepared a version of the New Testament in Amharic and rose to prominence during the war. He was sent to Paris, representing Abyssinia, at the time of the Treaty of Versailles. Meditating on the future of world peace the thought occurred to him that only through the sacrifice of CHRIST was this possible and his Abyssinian mind conceived the idea of representing this in symbolism. He sought out a Paris artist and gave him his ideas. The result is the famous painting of the Crucifixion so weird in its conception, so real in its symbolic significance, strangely attractive and compelling in its message.

The Saviour is hanging on a Cross which rests between two globes of the Eastern and western hemispheres against a cloudy and lurid sky. A halo of coming victory already rests above the thorn-crowned head of the Sufferer who looks down upon two worlds for which He died. Blood-drops from His pierced hands colour every continent and island red! It is a vision of the whole world redeemed by the blood of CHRIST. Underneath the painting one can read in three languages:

"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE" (John 3:16).

~ end of chapter 7 ~
