

You Were Looking for a Savior?, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. E2050116
Isaiah 49:1-7 and John 1:29-42
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Under the brown hills sloping up from the gently-flowing river, a powerful encounter took place. John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples, one of them named Andrew. On this particular day, John saw Jesus of Nazareth coming near. This was before Jesus had a public ministry, so there weren't crowds following Jesus.

On the other hand, John the Baptist did have disciples. In fact, some scholars say that this passage was included in John's gospel as an explanation of how John the Baptist's disciples became Jesus' disciples after John's imprisonment and murder.

As John saw Jesus, in our passage today, he said to his disciples, "This is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." That is an interesting statement. Jesus probably looked like any other ordinary man, but John the Baptist saw something special in him. He could discern God's spirit present in this man from Galilee.

What did it mean that John called Jesus "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world?" This is a definite theological statement for faithful Jewish folk. Every year, Passover is celebrated by eating lamb. Lambs were identified as sacrificial animals; people could clear up their religious debts by ritualistically slaughtering them.

John's is the only gospel in which Jesus is spoken of as saving in this manner. John probably based this concept upon the Isaiah passage about the suffering servant that is led to slaughter.

John's is the only gospel in which Jesus is crucified on the day before Passover when the Passover lambs were slain, instead of on Passover itself as reported in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The concept that people had to make ritual sacrifices in order to be acceptable to God was an old one, coming from the Hebrew Testament and probably long before that from more primitive religions.

The Levitical laws of the Hebrew Testament outlined various kinds of sacrifices to be made depending on what kind of sin or transgression one had committed.

"If the offering you bring as a sin offering is a sheep, you shall bring a female without blemish. You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin offering; and it shall be slaughtered as a sin offering at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered. The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. You shall remove all its fat, as the fat of the sheep is removed from the sacrifice of well-being, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, with the offerings by fire to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin that you have committed, and you shall be forgiven. (Leviticus 4:32-35)

All this bloody, smelly, and smokey sacrifice was in order to get on God's good side, but now, with Jesus, all of the sacrifices were unnecessary. This, according to John the Baptist, was the lamb who took away the sins of the whole world.

The account states that when John said that, these two disciples left John and followed Jesus. This could be likened to the transfer of a member from a church to another nearby. If the transfer is to this church, I might feel a little uncomfortable. I would not want to be accused of what we, in our business, call "sheep stealing," taking the members of other churches away. The other minister might wonder what the transferring member was dissatisfied with in the former church.

Jesus, perhaps uncomfortable that these disciples left John asked them, “What are you looking for? That’s a good question. It is like asking, “What can I do for you?” What were they looking for in John? Were they dissatisfied with his preaching ability? Were they tired of living in the desert? Were they looking for more action and adventure?

Or, did Jesus mean, what are you looking for in following me? I can’t give you any money, You probably won’t gain any fame or notoriety. “What are you looking for” by following me?”

John’s gospel is offering the concept of Jesus as lamb of God, but that’s not the only concept here. This passage from John’s gospel is rich with concepts about Jesus.

Son of God. What does that do for you, to know that Jesus is the son of God? Is he God’s child in a different way than you are? Or did he live his life differently than most people do because he knew in his heart the ramifications of that relationship? What would it do to our lives if we lived knowing full well that we are the son or daughter of God?

Rabbi (teacher). I like to teach. I love to watch people grow in knowledge and understanding. What is Jesus teaching you today?

Messiah (translated “anointed”). The Christ: Jesus the Messiah. To be anointed means to be set aside for special service. Sacrificial animals are anointed before slaughter. But also, healing Christians anoint with oil. It’s soothing.

Baptizer with the Holy Spirit. It is one thing to be baptized, immersed in the cleansing waters of church baptism, but that does not guarantee that you have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Only a complete response to Jesus’ call can do that.

Jesus asks the question of us today, “what are you looking for?” Were you looking for a sacrificial lamb who will get you on God’s good side? Will he make up for all the evil you have done? Were you looking for a savior? What kind of a savior? Someone who would ease your troubles? Someone who would guarantee you an eternal life of bliss? Someone who would bring peace to this troubled world? Did you find a savior?

This passage asks that we consider what it is we are looking for in following Jesus. Why are you here? What does Jesus mean to you?

I invite you into a deeper relationship with him. When you discover the depth and nuances of your relationship with Jesus, you will find that, as Paul described, “...you have been enriched in him.” (1 Corinthians 1:5) You will discover your gifts to be used in serving God and others. You will find strength to get you through.

Clarify your relationship with Jesus, and you will find patience and a secure footing for your journey through life. You will find yourself singing a new song, a song of praise to our God. You too, will put your trust in the LORD. (Psalm 40:4)