

2022.04.03 - What Are You Looking For? - Behold The Lamb

So What? Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb who brings healing to the entire world.

Feel What? Intrigued

Now What? Read John 1 several times this week. Immerse yourself in the story of Jesus, allowing yourself to ask new questions about the person and work of Jesus.

VISION CASTING

The purpose of Tallgrass at The Well is to create community together by inviting everyone into the Way of Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

We're beginning a new series for Easter called "What Are You Looking For?" where we're considering that question as it surfaces in the life of Jesus in the Gospel of John. And as we use this question to probe even our own desires and how to line them up with the commands and example of Jesus, we need to be aware that as Jesus is guiding us, he's asking us to choose. To make decisions that correspond with living in the kingdom of God so we enter into the kind of human flourishing that God has designed us for. And to make those decisions, we need to be aware of how we make decisions.

Psychologist and author Jonathan Haidt ("*hite*") uses a simple but brilliant example for how we make decisions and implement change into our life. Using the metaphor of a human rider on top of an elephant, Haidt explains that our brain is made of two systems. The rational system is what we use for planning and analyzing problems. We think we make decisions by just concluding to ourselves, "I want to take the path that way," but it's the emotional system is the elephant that provides all the power for travel. If a rider and an elephant ever got into a disagreement, who do you think wins? Have you ever felt torn in a decision-making process, like your brain and maybe what you call your heart just couldn't come to an agreement? Or have you ever felt stuck in a bad habit where you knew all the right things to do, but you just could bring yourself to do them? Your rider and and your elephant are having it out inside of you. To bring about actual change, you have to motivate and align both systems.

Jesus knows this about us. This is why he doesn't get into debates where he shouts down anyone who disagrees with him. What he does is speak indirectly so people are thrown off and the deeper motivations are uncovered.

Early in the Gospel of John, we're introduced to John the Baptist, who is a prophet God raised up to point to the Jewish Messiah. For years, he lived in the wilderness, apart from society, to hear the voice of God and to prepare for public ministry. He was actually a relative, and maybe cousin, of Jesus, so the understanding that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah was probably jarring to him. But he surrendered whatever doubts he had to faithfully proclaim the advent of the Messiah in Israel's midst.

John 1:35-42, NIV: The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

As Jesus' own public ministry commences, John knows his time has come to transfer his followers—his disciples—to Jesus. He doesn't want to be mistaken for Israel's King or to have his followers hang around when the God of the Universe has just stepped onto the scene. To get their attention on Jesus, he proclaims several times to them, "Look! It's God's Offering to restore humanity!"

We suffer a broken condition resulting from sin entering our world through an event named the Fall. Our problems aren't the result of decent intentions gone awry, but that humanity has rebellion against a good and beautiful God sown into our hearts. We want to do things our way on our timetables. And to fix this break requires something we don't possess in and of ourselves.

So, this Lamb of God has been sent from God to bring healing and reconciliation by getting to the root of our situation. And the word "lamb" is something Jews in the Ancient

Near East would immediately recognize from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah the Prophet:

Isaiah 53:4, 7-8, NIV: But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ... 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 its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.

We'll return to the discussion of salvation in a moment. But as John's disciples are introduced to Jesus, he asks them—and us—a piercing question: What do you want? Meaning, *What are you looking for?*

How would you answer that? The Man Jesus standing in front of you, his piercing gaze staring into the depths of your soul. Him, full of compassion. Full of truth. Full of mystery. What is it that you're looking for?

Well, how about it? Why do you watch the shows you watch, vacation where you vacation, and shop where you shop?

Why do you open your Bible during the week? Why do you pray the prayers you do?

Why did you come to church today?

What are you searching for?

God asks us this question not because he doesn't know, as if he lacks information about us. He asks to draw us out of ourselves so we're aware of our hopes, our fears, and our compulsions.

There are internal narratives coursing through our beings, deposited there over the years, shaping us and giving us direction.

James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God*: "We are creatures who live by our stories. From early on we are told stories by our parents, which help us interpret how life is or how life ought to be. We are naturally drawn to stories and must follow them to their conclusion because stories are exciting. Jesus taught primarily in story form. One reason might be that stories are memorable. We may not be able to remember many (or any) of the Beatitudes, but we all can

remember the story of the prodigal son. When we have a significant experience—one that shapes us—we turn it into a story.”

1. **Family Narratives** are the stories we have learned from our families of origin. Our parents and caregivers impart to us their worldview and ethos so we are able to tell right from wrong and to navigate questions such as Who am I? Why am I here? and Am I valuable?
2. **Cultural Narratives** are particular to where you’ve grown up and give you a framework for how others view success. Think of Americans and our rugged individualism vs Eastern cultures and their values for honor and communal responsibility.
3. **Religious Narratives** are stories we hear preached from the stage and taught in the classrooms and religious books that help us understand God and what he desires for and from us.

Becoming aware of these narratives is a life-long journey, especially as they may contradict the final narrative,

4. **Jesus’ Narratives**, the stories and images Jesus tells to reveal the character of God.

These followers respond to Jesus by asking him where he’s staying. I find this interaction curious. There is certainly a cultural narrative at work where they’re trying to understand what part of Israel he’s from, who his family is, and assign meaning and value based off those answers.

But, also, they want to know where he’s living. Where he hangs out. Where is the place they can reliably find him when and maybe if they get around to checking him out. But he presses the invitation back: Come and find out. They want to know where he’s static and he tells them that the answer will always be dynamic. God is on a mission, and it will always take us sacrificing our comfort and convenience to join him. And while these disciples want an answer, Jesus is continually issuing an invitation.

As they spend the day together, these new apprentices become convinced that John is correct: Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. Those who were evangelized become evangelists themselves. They begin inviting others to follow this Rabbi and when Jesus sees Peter and calls out his true identity. He doesn’t try to convince Peter who he is. Instead, he reaches deep into his soul to pull out who Peter is going to become. Jesus calls us by

our name before we're all the way there because he's motivating the elephant in all of us.

Transition: How does the Jesus, the Lamb, take away the sin of the world? What is it that Jesus is offering Peter and the other disciples?

SOLUTION

Because what Jesus offers is more than amnesty. It's more than just a wave of the hand and everyone is forgiven. What Jesus offers is something that changes all of their lives. It takes loudmouth but spineless Peter, and truly changes him into the bold apostolic leader he was created to be.

The technical, theological term for what Jesus is offering is atonement—how God removes the separation and brings humanity back into relationship with him. And throughout Church history, there has been plenty of speculation on the exact means by which he does this. In fact, it can be dizzying if you're new to atonement theory, but I believe if you can order a specialty drink at Arrow Coffee, you can incorporate some theological terms into your vocabulary. So, set your ice oat milk matcha latte down and let's dig in.

Joshua McNall, *The Mosaic Of Atonement*: “For many people, the atonement seems like a puzzle with pieces that do not fit while other crucial bits are missing. ... In response, Christians have developed models, metaphors, and motifs that help articulate the meaning of redemption. These ‘pieces’ of the picture represent imperfect attempts to imagine how Christ’s work actually *works*. ... Like a puzzle, the pieces of mosaic artwork remain visible upon completion. Unlike a photograph, whose tiny pixels present a seamless blend of color and shape, both puzzles and mosaics show us *how* the pieces fit together while also allowing each piece to retain a recognizable particularity. If one stands close, one can identify the individual squares of glass or tile that compose the greater picture. And if one steps back, one can admire the larger image. Yet when presented with the great mosaics of age-old Christian churches, viewers are meant not to *construct* the image but to appreciate it. The goal is worship.”



1. **Recapitulation** - This view centers Adam and Jesus. Adam failed to live up to God's standard when he rebelled, and Jesus is the "Second Adam" who did what the first Adam could not do. He lived a blameless life and, where Adam only passed on death, Jesus has passed on to us his life. Support for this is seen in Romans 5 where the Apostle Paul says through one man death entered the world, but through Jesus grace has been passed on to the many.
2. **Substitution** - In this view, Jesus bore the penalty for human sin upon the cross. He was substituted for us because divine judgement was poured out on him instead of us. This view is popular among Evangelical Protestants, and there are streams that emphasize God's wrath punishing sin in what's known as Penal Substitution. Isaiah 53, which we read earlier, is one of the primary texts where this view is found in Scripture.
3. **Christus Victor** - This view sees all of salvation as a triumph and it emphasizes how, through his death the cross, Jesus disarmed principalities and powers in his defeat of Satan and Jesus' resurrection is the proof of Jesus' victory. Support is found in **1 John 3:8: The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.**
4. **Moral Influence** - This view is popular in the Orthodox Church tradition, and sees love as a transforming power. Because **1 John 4:8 says God is love**, Jesus is love incarnate that was willing to go the utter distance by dying a self-giving death on the cross for us and to welcome us back into his family. Jesus is the exemplar in all things of how we should live, always focusing on the good of others. And anything in us that hinders us needs to be healed and surrendered.

Transition: Once we grasp the differing theories of atonement, is there anything further to appreciate about them? Is it only for our information that we mention these things?

APPLICATION

Indeed, yes. Beholding Jesus is not just a mental assent to the stories and Scripture and the teachings of Jesus. It's much more than that. It's opening ourselves up—the elephant part of us—and allowing the Spirit of God to probe our hearts so we can be shaped and formed to be more like Jesus.

2 Corinthians 3:15-18, NIV: Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

When we contemplate the person and work of Jesus, there is a divine partnership where the Spirit of God brings about a greater supernatural reality in us where we are transformed into his likeness. We don't get this on the run. When we behold—or “come and see”—who he is, he shares more of himself with us. The saints of old called this the mystical union—he pours himself into us and we're changed by the encounter.

Why does this matter? To apprentice to Jesus means to be with him, like him, and do what he does. While we'll never take away the sin of the world, there is still much we can do to be about the Father's business in our spheres of influence.

1. **Recapitulation** - Where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. And we can follow in the Way of Jesus as God's representatives. We can bless and share good news. We can cultivate and expand the footprint of heaven. Jesus taught us to pray, “On earth, as it is in heaven.” He means that. In our city, in our neighborhood, as it is in heaven. He has placed you in impossible situations so you can draw upon supernatural wisdom so impossible becomes possible.
2. **Substitution** - Jesus laid down his life for the sake of others. We do the same when we don't return hate for hate and violence for violence. When we become as a servant and take the lowly position, we are reflecting his image.
3. **Christus Victor** - If Jesus has disarmed the principalities and powers, they are then ripe for plunder! If Jesus has taken the spiritual empowerment from broken world

systems, then we can invade them and invite God's kingdom here on earth. What broken system keeps you up at night? Food scarcity? Racism? Childhood impoverishment? Disease and war? There are cycles of human history that will continue to carry on unless the Spirit of God through the Church intervenes.

4. **Moral Influence** - This is one where the church has tried to gain political power to force our will on people who believe differently than us. This is not the way. God is love, and he is at work creating a people of love. They are free of themselves and bring hope into dark places. He was beaten, brutalized, and betrayed for the greater good of reconciling humanity, yet I'm when inflamed at online trolls and when I get cut off in traffic. This tells me there's much more transformation that needs to take place—much more beholding the Lamb!

OBJECTIONS

And yet, I know, there are some here who aren't ready to say they believe in Jesus. You can't quite get to a place where you believe in all the miracles. Or you see too many errors in the Bible. Or you look at the behavior of Christians and wonder, "If God is real, why are they so jacked up?"

I get it, and it's ok. The invitation from Jesus still stands: Come and see. You don't have to have everything figured out, and you don't have to agree with everything.

INSPIRATION

And while we may even be looking for everything but God, Jesus is still looking for us to bring us home.

My story.

CONCLUSION

Next Step:

- Read John 1 several times this week. Immerse yourself in the story of Jesus, allowing yourself to ask new questions about the person and work of Jesus.

Prayer

Invitation