

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 12 December 2021**

Children's Talk: What the Lord is Like When We've Done Something Wrong

- We talk a lot about how loving and kind the Lord is.
- But today I want to talk about what the Lord is like when we've done something wrong.
 - Maybe we've said something mean or done something mean.
 - Or maybe we didn't do something that we promised we would do.
- What does the Lord feel about us then?
 - When we do something bad, there's often a part of us that is angry with ourselves.
 - And so we might assume that the Lord is angry at us too.
- But let's see what the Lord Himself tells us about this.
 - He uses the word condemn and condemn means either to say that something is bad or to say that someone should be punished for a bad thing that they did.
- Jesus said this:
 - John 3:17 (NKJV)
 - ¹⁷ ...God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.
- The Lord didn't come into the world to say how bad people in the world are or so that people in the world would be punished.
 - Why did He come?
 - So that the world could be *saved* through Him.
 - That's really good to know: the Lord is always working to save us—that's always His goal.
- But, because He wants to save us, that means that He is going to try to help us see when we have done something wrong.
 - If the Lord didn't care about us, then He wouldn't care how we behaved—He wouldn't care if we did good things or bad things.
 - But He *does* care about us and so He does care whether you and I do good things or do bad things.
- Let's listen to a bit more of what the Lord said about this:
 - John 3:18-21 (NKJV)
 - ¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."
- There's a lot to talk about in that.
 - One point is that there is a condemnation—there is a saying that certain things are wrong.

- And there is even a warning that bad things will happen to us if we do what's wrong.
- Another thing He said was that, when someone is doing evil things, then they hate the light because they don't want other people to see what they're doing.
 - I can relate to that and maybe you can too.
 - When I've done something wrong, then I want to hide.
 - I don't want anyone to know or to find out.
 - And if anyone talks to me about it, I feel ashamed.
 - Have you ever felt like that?
- When we're feeling like that, it can be good to remember that the Lord did not come to condemn us but to save us.
 - He doesn't want to just make us feel bad; He wants to help us.
 - And so, even though we might feel like we want to just hide in the darkness, we need to let Him come and shine light into our lives.
 - That's how He can help us.
 - That's how He can help us to understand how things went wrong.
 - That's how He can help us to figure out what we could do instead next time.
 - And that's how He can save us.
- Maybe you can think of a time when you had a fight with your brother or sister, or friend, or cousin.
 - And then maybe your mom comes to you and says that you need to talk to her about what happened.
 - And you don't want to talk about it at all.
 - It feels too bad and too hard.
 - And you just want to forget that it ever happened.
 - And it's seems really scary to talk about it and to acknowledge that maybe you did something that you shouldn't have done.
 - But often it can feel much better by the end.
 - That's what the Lord wants for you.
- Sometimes, we can talk about something bad that we've done with someone else and it feels OK.
 - Because the person feels safe.
 - Because we know that they love us no matter what.
 - Because we know that they'll understand.
 - The Lord is like that times infinity!
 - He has sooooo much love for you!
 - He has sooooo much understanding of you, and the situation, and what was hard for you.
- You can always talk to Him about what you've done and He will always understand and always love you and help you figure out what to do.
- He did not come into the world to condemn you but to save you.
- *Amen.*

The Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith
12 December 2021

Intro

- What is the Lord's role in your life in regards to your sins?
- Maybe that's a bit of a deep theological question to put you on the spot and ask you.
 - But I think it's a really fruitful question to reflect on.
 - Your sins—the things that you have done wrong, the ways you have broken the Lord's commandments, the harm that you have caused to other people by your action or inaction—what is the Lord's role in your life relative to those sins?
- Part of why I'm asking this is that I would guess that the average person who has had some exposure to the teachings of the New Church might have a bit of trouble answering that question.
- And it's intriguing because, in contrast, I would also guess that it would be a pretty easy question for an average Christian who attends another church to answer.
- It's the foundational idea in mainline Christianity about why Jesus came into the world: He came to die for our sins and wipe them away.
 - Like the old Gospel song says, "Oh happy day! When Jesus washed my sins away!"
- But a person who has heard some of the teachings of the New Church would be skeptical of that explanation.
 - "That's not really how it works, right?"
 - But then they might not know what the Lord's role then is.
 - If He doesn't wash away our sins then does He have any role with them at all?
 - And so then New Church people can end up taking the full burden of dealing with their sins onto themselves.
 - "I've just got to work even hard to repent and shun evils!"
 - And that's not right either.
- What got me onto this topic was that, as Joel mentioned last week, we are focussing on the Gospel of John for our sermons leading up to Christmas this year.
 - And, in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, it's talking about John the Baptist and one day people are asking him who he is and he is telling them categorically that he is *not* the Christ or Messiah but that there *is* someone else coming whose shoe strap John is not worthy to loose.
- And then we read this:
 - John 1:29 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
 - The next day John looks at Jesus coming to him, and says, "See! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"
 - "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"—that's a phrase worth spending some time reflecting on.
 - It speaks to who Jesus is and why He came into the world and what He can do for us.
 - But what does it really mean?
 - Let's get into it.

The Appeal and Value of Believing That Jesus Can Take Away Our Sin

- I want to start by talking about the appeal and the value of believing that Jesus can take away our sin.
- This verse is often used by mainstream Christians when trying to convince non-Christians to become Christians.
 - The pitch usually goes something like this:
 - “You’ve messed up. You’ve done things that you shouldn’t have. You’ve hurt people. But that’s OK! John chapter 1 verse 29 says that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus died for you. And because He did, if you believe in Him, then all of your sins will be taken away! So pray this prayer today and be saved by Him.”
 - There are problems with this and we’ll come to those in a minute but first I actually want to talk about the *value* of a belief like this.
- Imagine someone who has messed up pretty badly.
 - They’ve done a lot of things that they regret.
 - They carry the weight of that with them.
 - And they feel trapped by it—like they can never escape that cycle.
- And then someone tells them that Jesus loves them anyway and all their past history has been wiped away and they can be a good person now.
 - That’s pretty appealing and it might actually help that person change their behaviour.
 - And again, compare this to what the same person might feel if they got an incomplete understanding of New Church church teachings on the topic and concluded that they are entirely responsible for dealing with their own sins.
 - That understanding might lead a person to think that they’ll never be able to change because their own will power is always going to be inadequate to make the changes last.
- So there is a reason why the belief that Jesus has taken away our sins is appealing and there’s even a lot of good that can come from it.
- But it also has some major problems.
 - One major problem with this belief system is that it can really get in the way of our future efforts to deal with our sins and our inclinations to sin.
 - Because we know that we’re going to want to do those sinful things again—whatever they are.
 - Situations will come up in which we are tempted or in which we are strongly pulled back into those harmful behaviours.
 - Sometimes people just tell themselves that it’s fine if they sin, they’ve still been wiped clean and that is a terribly destructive rationalisation of sinful behaviour.
 - Other times people just desperately cling to the idea that they have been wiped clean from their sinful behaviour.
 - But then they can’t look at the situations they’re in and the selfish inclinations that they’re dealing with head on and acknowledge them and deal with them effectively.
 - Instead they’ll be focussed on trying to deny that they even exist.
 - That’s not going to help them.

- We need a belief system that helps us be honest with ourselves, not one that encourages us to be self-delusional.
- Another major problem with this belief system is that it's just not true.
 - And if we're working hard to change our behaviour and live a new life then we need the firm foundation of genuine truth, not some too-good-to-be-true fantasy that will eventually fall apart.
 - It reminds me a bit of children believing in Santa Claus and thinking that he has a nice list and a naughty list.
 - This might temporarily encourage children to behave a bit better so that they can get their Christmas presents but eventually they're going to find out that the whole thing is made up.
 - There's a similarly made up mythology behind the idea that Jesus came and wiped away all of our sins by His death on the cross.
 - The story goes that God the Father, because of Divine Justice, has to punish people for sinful behaviour and so we all should be damned to hell.
 - But Jesus, as a second person of the Trinity, agreed to go down to the world and die on the cross to take the punishment for our sins on Him in place of us so that we would no longer have to pay that debt and instead could have salvation through believing in Jesus.
 - That's the story but it's not true.
 - And it gives people a very strange and very problematic understanding of who God is and how to relate to Him.
- Ok, so now shall we finally try to get to a more accurate and useful understanding of the Lord's role in our lives in regards to our sin and the meaning of Jesus being "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"?
 - Let's take it phrase by phrase and let's start with the idea of "The Lamb of God".

The Lamb of God

- A lot of the time when lambs are mentioned in the Bible it is in reference to them being offered as a sacrifice.
- The Children of Israel were meant to offer lambs on the altar as part of their daily sacrifices.
 - Exodus 29:38-39 (NKJV)
 - ³⁸ Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. ³⁹ One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight.
- They were also supposed to offer a lamb as part of their annual Passover observance.
- And when they sinned they were also supposed to offer the kid of a goat or a lamb as a sin offering.
 - If they offered a lamb as their sin offering then it had to be "a female without blemish" (Leviticus 4:32).
 - There were specific instructions about how they were to kill the animal, what they were supposed to do with the blood and the fat, and how they were to offer it on the altar.
 - And then it says, "So the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him" (Leviticus 4:35).

- In the prophets this imagery is carried on in reference to what the Messiah will do.
 - Here are a few excerpts from Isaiah chapter 53:
 - Isaiah 53:6-8, 12 (NKJV, modified)
 - ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And Jehovah has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
 -
 - ⁷ He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
 -
 - ⁸ For the transgressions of My people He was stricken
 -
 - ¹² And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.
- And in the book of Revelation there is a repeated imagery of the Lamb that was slain that redeemed us to God by His blood (Revelation 5:9-12; *et. al.*)
- Now, the typical explanation of the significance of all of this would be to say that, "Like all those unblemished lambs that were offered to make atonement for the people's sins before, Jesus was the perfect, unblemished Lamb of God who offered Himself to make atonement for our sins."
 - And that much is true.
 - But then they would go on to say that, in doing this Jesus took on the punishment for our sins and New Church teachings would say that *that* is a misunderstanding of what the Lord did and a misunderstanding, in fact, of how sacrifices work.
 - When a lamb was sacrificed, it was not being punished; it was being offered as a good thing.
 - There is punishment inherent in evil.
 - When we do selfish and harmful things it will eventually cause us pain.
 - But that punishment is not something that God wants to or has to inflict on us and it certainly isn't something that can be transferred to another person or animal.
 - Imagine this in a home environment.
 - Let's say that a little boy discovers where some sweets have been hidden for Christmas up in a high cupboard.
 - And he sneaks and takes some of the sweets and eats them.
 - Then his dad finds that some of the sweets are gone and asks his son whether he knows what happened to them.
 - And the son lies about it and says that he has no idea what could have happened to them.
 - But then the dad finds sweet wrappers in the boy's bed.
 - So the dad decides that he's going to punish the boy but the boy says, "Please don't punish me!"
 - And the dad says, "I don't want to punish you but I've got to punish something for what you've done."
 - So the boy says, "How about you punish the cat?"
 - So the dad kicks the cat.

- And the whole situation is perfectly resolved.
- It just doesn't make much sense does it?
 - And it still doesn't make sense if we imagine a slightly different version of the same story where the boy doesn't say, "How about you punish the cat?" but instead says, "Don't punish me; Jesus died on the cross for me and took the punishment for my sins."
 - That doesn't work.
- So what is going on in sacrifices?
 - In the first chapter of Isaiah we read this:
 - Isaiah 1:11 (NKJV, modified)
 - 11 "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?"
Says Jehovah.
"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
And the fat of fed cattle.
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
Or of lambs or goats."
 - Then Jehovah talks about other external things that He does not want—religious feasts, incense, prayers.
 - And then Jehovah says this:
 - Isaiah 1:16-18
 - 16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.
Cease to do evil,
 - 17 Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Rebuke the oppressor;
Defend the fatherless,
Plead for the widow.
 - 18 "Come now, and let us reason together,"
Says Jehovah,
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool."
- Jehovah doesn't want endless external sacrifices.
 - He wants people to stop doing evil and learn to do good.
 - That is what will make it so that God can make their sins as white as snow!
- As David writes in Psalm 51,
 - Psalm 51:16-17 (NKJV)
 - 16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.
 - 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

- The Lord did not want all of those lambs to die—that wasn't the point at all.
 - He wanted what those innocent lambs represented.
 - He wanted the people to have that innocence, that goodness, that willingness to be led.
 - In any relationship, when people have sinned, when hurt has been cause, what will bring redemption?
 - What will bring reconciliation and atonement?
 - Innocence. Goodness. Repentance.
 - A contrite heart.
 - Commitment to clean up our act and learn to do what's right.
- The teachings of the New Church say that, in the time of the Children of Israel, the people were not receptive to deeper truths about the real, internal work of religion.
 - And so all the commandments about animal sacrifice were a stopgap—a way to at least get the people to not commit human sacrifice and a way for them to be obediently doing something that at least represented the real work that they should have been doing, until the time was right for the Lord to come into the world and show them what it was really all about.
- And so when John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said, “See! The Lamb of God....” he was expressing the truth that Jesus was finally showing what all of those sacrifices had really meant all along.
 - Jesus Christ was all of those teachings in the Word about sacrifices made flesh in human form.
 - All the goodness and innocence represented by all those lambs that were sacrificed over the years was fully embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Ok, but if Jesus didn't take on the punishment for our sins by His sacrifice as the Lamb of God, then what does it mean that He takes away the sin of the world?

“...who takes away the sin of the world.”

- *The Lord* §17

- We must now say something about what is meant by taking away sins. Taking away sins has the same meaning as the redeeming and saving of mankind. For the Lord came into the world to save mankind. Without His advent no mortal could have been reformed and reborn and therefore saved. But this became possible after the Lord had taken away all power from the devil—that is, from hell—and had glorified His humanity—that is, united it to the Divinity of His Father. If He had not done both of these, no one could have received any Divine truth and retained it in them, and still less any Divine goodness; for the devil, who had the greater power before these events, would have plucked these from their heart.

It is apparent from this that by His suffering of the cross the Lord did not take away any sins, but that He bears them away, that is, removes them, in the case of people who believe in Him by living in accordance with His commandments.

Everyone can see from reason alone, provided he possesses some enlightenment, that sins cannot be removed from a person except through the practice of actual repentance, which is for the person to see his sins, implore the Lord's help, and desist from them.

- By coming into the world, the Lord made it possible for our sins to be taken away from us.
 - John didn't say that the job was done—He didn't say, "See! the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world."
 - And John also didn't say that it would happen instantaneously—He didn't say, "See! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in an instant as soon as you accept Him as your personal Saviour."
 - It will be a process, over the course of our lifetimes, to have the Lord take away our sins but it is possible because of what the Lord did and because of what the Lord is actively doing in each of our lives right now.

- Let's go back to that example of the little boy who stole the Christmas sweets.
 - There will need to be consequences for him taking the sweets and lying about it.
 - At minimum, his Dad will need to tell him that he will get to have less sweets than other people on Christmas Day.
 - At maybe he will not get any more from that particular packet of sweets at all.
 - But he is already experiencing the deeper pain or punishment of that wrong behaviour within himself.
 - At the deepest level, it hurts to know that you've taken something that you shouldn't have.
 - And it hurts to have lied to or deceived people who love you.
 - And a good parent will gently try to help their child acknowledge what they've done and the pain of it.
 - And the parent will also help them to find that part of them that is innocent and good.
 - The dad might say, "I know that you're a good guy and you do a lot of hard work to not take things that aren't yours. And you are often honest with me about when you've done something wrong. We're going to keep on working on this and the Lord will help you to do better next time. And should I also put the sweets somewhere that's harder for you to get to?"

- Maybe it feels a bit ridiculous to talk about it with this particular example but, if the Lord had not come into the world, that little boy would have had no chance to be able to resist evil inclinations.
 - And nor would his father.
 - Or anybody else.
 - We would all have been entirely enslaved to our selfish and hellish motivations.

- The Lord is the One—and the only One—who makes it possible for us to be anything other than entirely selfish.
 - He is the one who has the power to take away our sinful behaviour and our sinful motivations, bit by bit, day by day.
 - Because He came into this world and, through Mary, took on the same weaknesses and selfish inclinations that all of us have.
 - He carried the weight of countless generations of selfish behaviour and tendencies.

- He bore all of that for us.
- And He never gave in—He never did what was selfish or mean-spirited or controlling or deceptive—none of it.
- And in so doing He brought hell back under control.
- So today we are still influenced by hell in a big way—and sometimes we have to fight like anything to resist doing what’s wrong.
 - But we can do it because of the Lord.
 - And as we struggle we can know that the Lord has been through anything that we are dealing with—including the simple inclination to take something that doesn’t belong to us.

Conclusion: See!

- To wrap this up let’s talk about the one part of this phrase we haven’t spent time on yet—the first word: “See!”
 - “See! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
 - John the Baptist was directing people’s attention to Jesus Christ and he was telling them what they were looking at.
 - We should also respond to this command.
 - We should focus our attention on the Lord and see and understand who He is and what He can do.
 - He is the one who takes away the sin of the world.
- Anytime that anybody has managed to leave their sinful life behind or even managed to leave just one sinful behaviour behind, it was the Lord who did that.
 - If you heard about a marriage program that had saved thousands of marriages, that would be a program worth knowing about.
 - If you heard about an addiction recovery program that had helped thousands of people escape from their addiction, that would be worth knowing about.
 - The Lord is the one who saves marriages, who helps people recover from addiction, who helps people stop being dishonest with themselves and with others, who helps people become better parents and husbands and wives and just human beings.
- He is the one who takes away the sin of the world.
 - See Him!
 - And come to Him in the Holy Supper and ask Him what sin you need to work on with Him right now.
 - And He will help you because He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
- *Amen.*