

WITNESS TO CHRIST—JOHN THE BAPTIST

John 1:29-34

Tattoos used to be associated with sailors, military, and male blue collar workers. But many other people have decided to have them, including women and famous athletes. Some Christians have tattoos with pictures and words that witness to their faith.

However this increase in the popularity of tattoos has led to an increase in tattoo removal. A 2018 Harris Poll survey showed the number of Americans considering tattoo removal is on the rise. To remove a single tattoo can take up to twelve sessions spread out over the course of two years and each treatment can cost between \$1-400.

If our regrets showed up as tattoos, how many would we have? What would we see in the mirror? A loved one we've lied to? The amount of money we have wasted? The "could haves" and "should haves?" "I could have been a better father or husband. I should have helped them?"

Dig out the basement or old dusty storage boxes of our lives? What do we see? Anger, neglect, gossip, jealousy, bitterness. How do we get rid of all those tattoos?

There are two ways we try to deal with them. One is to be defensive. We don't tell anyone. We don't admit anything. We keep the skeletons in the closet with the key hidden. We try to deflect any examination of our own lives, by focusing on the faults of others. If we chop them down, then we aren't so low by comparison. Don't ever address it, cover it up, don't admit it, don't confess!

The other way we deal with it is by being defeated. We don't feel we make mistakes; we are mistakes! We don't foul up; we are a foul up! We take the role of judge, jury, and prosecutors. We are guilty—forever!

Defensive people hide marks. Defeated people replay them. But either way, the marks are still there.

Tonight we begin Lent by looking at the first of many people in John's Gospel who witness to Jesus. Tonight we look at John the Baptist. John sees Jesus, points Him out to His disciples, and says, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Why not just make it simpler and say, "There's the one sent to save us from sin!" "Lamb of God" meant something very specific and concrete to Jews like John. The most important event in the history of those Jews was when God freed them from slavery in Egypt. He did this by sending the angel of death to kill all the first born males in each family. But ancestors of the Jews under Moses were commanded by God to sacrifice a lamb and place its blood on the side and head

posts of their doors. When the angel of death came to one of those houses, it would “pass over” the house and kill no one there. The people were commanded to remember that event by having a “Passover” each year. A lamb was slaughtered. “Passover” is a big deal in John’s Gospel, which he mentions eleven times. Also another lamb would also be killed on their yearly day of repentance, the “Day of Atonement.” The blood was to be taken by the high priest into the temple of God and in the inner court, called the “Holy of Holies,” the blood was poured over the Ark of the Covenant, which was God’s throne of earth. This would “atone” or “cover” the sins of the people. This would provide forgiveness.

So when John says, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” He is saying Jesus is the real lamb who would be sacrificed so that his sin could cover our sins. John’s witness is clear. We don’t have to be defensive or defeatist about our sins. Jesus has come to cover them, to forgive us!

Jesus takes away our sin. Notice that is in the present tense. And He takes away not only our guilt—what we do wrong, but our shame—which is sin done to us. We can feel stigmatized because of a divorce, the loss of a job, the loss of our savings—and other people know it. But there is also our private shame—being molested, abused, teased without mercy. No one else may know, but we do.

The movie “Schindler’s List” is about man who is a war profiteer in Nazi Germany who seems to live only for his own selfish needs. But then as he witnesses the Holocaust against the Jews, he does what he can to spare their lives. He befriends the commandant of the local concentration camp, a creep named Amon Goeth. As they are talking after having too much to drink, he talks to Goeth about a king who has real power, not when he executes his subjects, but when he spares them. This gets into Goeth’s head. He has a Jewish boy in the camp clean out a stain in his bathtub. The boy cannot do it. Instead of punishing the boy as he would normally do, he decides to let it go. As the boy leaves to return to the camp Goeth looks in the mirror. He realizes that his act of mercy hasn’t changed anything. He is still who is, a ruthless killer. So he takes his rifle, leans out the window and shoots the boy dead before he gets into the compound.

So it is with us on our own with our sin. We can’t remove it. Sin has marked us, and that is the end of the story.

No. it’s not.

We don’t have to drink away our sins. Work out our sin. Explain away our sin, cry away our sin, or bury it away. “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

So we can give our sins to Jesus. Tell Jesus what you did. Tell Jesus what you saw, what you took, what you said, how you feel, what you thought. Hold nothing back. Do it once,

twice, ten times a day. The devil likes to traffic in shame and guilt. Tell him, “I left my sin with the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

When Jesus rose from the dead, He still had it on Him and still does, the marks of His crucifixion. Those were the result of His cruel death on the cross. But instead of those marks disappearing, they, and the cross itself, have become marks of joy, not shame. They show the great love of Jesus which alone can take away both the guilt and shame of our sin. In Isaiah 49:16 He says to us, “I have engraved you on the palms of My hands.” In Jesus we do not have to be defensive or defeated—for we are delivered!