

THE BEAUTY OF THE LAMB OF GOD

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“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev 5:12, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

As the family of Seventh-day Adventists, we set aside this month and especially this particular Sabbath as the Heritage Sabbath and Spirit of Prophecy day to remember God’s leading in the past so that we may be sure that He will lead us in the future. That is why we are going to look through the pages of the Bible to meet the main Person—Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. We will fix our eyes on His beauty so that through this prism we may learn to see each other, ourselves and the road we are on, in a more attractive way.

Ellen G. White died 100 years ago, on July 16, 1915. Her prophetic contribution focused on Jesus—His life, His death for our salvation, His high-priestly ministry, and His soon return, and exploring the implications that such themes have in the church and in our personal lives. Her most-treasured books expound these themes, books such as *Steps to Christ*, *The Desire of Ages*, and *The Great Controversy*. She would want us to focus on Jesus, too, which we will do today. We are going to look at the Lamb of God in light of these themes: how He is introduced in symbol, then revealed in person, now ministers for us, and is coming again. And we will let Ellen White enrich our understanding of these things, by quoting from her in key places.

In spite of varied cultural and worldview differences, each person on this earth desires something beautiful and eye-catching. Even harsh criminals and all pleasure-denouncing ascetics still have this desire somewhere deep inside of their being. This should not surprise anyone, because God created human beings and the surrounding environment in just such a way. On the sixth day He “saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen 1:31); and because it was good, it was perfect and beautiful from the inside out.

THE LAMB OF GOD IS INTRODUCED

Unfortunately, this beauty was soon marred with sin, and the loving Creator had to intervene in order to wash away the sin of Adam and Eve. The Lord had to slay an innocent animal and clothe the sinful and naked couple (Gen 3:21). Further, God in His foreknowledge and wisdom announced the first promise to Adam and Eve: “And I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (v. 15). Ellen White wrote, “This sentence, spoken in the hearing of our first parents, was to them a promise. Before they heard of the thorn and the thistle, of the toil and sorrow that must be their portion, or of the dust to which they must return, they listened to words that could not fail of giving them hope. All that had been lost by yielding to Satan could be regained through Christ” (*Education*, p. 27).

The promise that was given to the first couple was the promise about “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). In your personal life there may have been a time when you first realized that you are a sinner and you need to be cleansed from something that disconnects you from the Heavenly Father. You may have felt like you were standing naked in the presence of the Almighty. Then, after you confessed your sin before Him, the heavy burden was lifted up and you knew for sure that you were forgiven, clothed in Christ’s perfect righteousness. How awesome to experience this forgiveness, not just once in a lifetime, but every day in our earthly journey!

Throughout the Old Testament era, God’s people sacrificed innocent animals to obtain forgiveness of their sins. To the young nation of Israel about to escape from Egypt, the Lord introduced something special—the Passover feast that, as Ellen White wrote, “was to be both commemorative and typical, not only pointing back to the deliverance from Egypt, but forward to the greater deliverance which Christ was to accomplish in freeing His people from the bondage of sin” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 277). The sacrificial lamb that every family had to offer to God represented the real Lamb of God, in whom is the only hope of salvation. The Passover had to be celebrated every year to remind people of their bondage and their regained freedom. The blood of the slain lamb that protected every family of God’s people during the last plague in Egypt symbolized the end of their slavery. God Himself miraculously brought them out to start a new, free life.

Likewise, the Lord is in the business of saving your life and mine from slavery to sin by granting us the freedom that every redeemed person experiences in Jesus Christ. We do not need to live in sin anymore; it brings only misery, slavery, and death. Jesus has purchased our freedom with His blood. It is our privilege to accept it and enjoy a new life, free from whatever had disconnected us from the Lord.

In addition to the Passover sacrifice in Israelite homes, a year-old lamb was sacrificed on the altar in the sanctuary every morning and evening. It symbolized the daily consecration of the people to God and their dependence upon the future coming Messiah whose blood was to complete the process of atonement.

God did everything for us. This is one side of the coin, but there is another. The story of the Israelites and their sacrifices reminds us of our obligations to God. As Christians we receive so many benefits from Him: our energy, abilities, families, health, and more—even life itself. However, the real questions are: What are we giving back to Him? What are we sacrificing?

The Israelites had to sacrifice the very best—a lamb that was so dear to them and so innocent. We might also bring to Him the most expensive objects or large sums of money and relax in the thought that we have done our part. But would this be enough? Can we purchase salvation or our life? The answer is obvious: No! Paul reminds us that God desires something better from us. He says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). Ellen White put it this way: “Those who love Him with all the heart, will desire to give Him the best service of the life, and they will be constantly seeking to bring every power of their being into

harmony with the laws that will promote their ability to do His will” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 353).

The pioneers of our church did so. They served the Lord sacrificially and spread the Gospel wherever and whenever they could. Our faithful spiritual ancestors did the same. Today it is our turn to follow them. But we will be able to do so only if we love God. Therefore answer the following questions. Do you love God? How have you shown your love for the beautiful, slain Lamb of God? Give Him your heart! Your all! Remember that the Lamb of God desires the best sacrifice—your life!

THE LAMB OF GOD IS REVEALED

After the world had waited four thousand years for His arrival, the Messiah was born in Judea, in fulfillment of the Bible’s promises (Dan 9:26, 27; Micah 5:2). His perfect life and untiring ministry to the sick and the needy clearly demonstrated His character and purpose. But that was just one aspect of His earthly life. There have been many good people in this world who loved others and were ready to do anything to help them. However, Christ’s mission was much wider and deeper than just being a good citizen. He took upon Himself the sins of the world, including yours and mine. He was crucified on the cross, not for doing something bad Himself, but to bear upon Himself all the evil of this world. He became the real sacrificial Lamb of God, the One to whom all other sacrifices pointed. In Him the promise became reality.

Jesus submissively obeyed all the requirements of the Law. His death on Calvary, which provided forgiveness to human beings, also showed the unchangeable nature of the Law. God could not and did not change His law, as it was ingrained in the very foundations of His rule, “but,” as Ellen White put it, “He sacrificed Himself, in Christ, for man’s redemption” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 762). Because God and Christ are one, Jesus willingly gave Himself as an innocent sacrificial lamb in order to bear the penalty for our sins and to reveal to everyone that God is love, as a universally favorite Bible verse says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Over the years, this simple but powerful verse has brought hope and strength to millions of men and women around the world who put their trust in God. Faith makes a difference in the life. It is not passive but active. This faith in the loving God through Jesus Christ moved William Miller to preach the soon return of the Savior. The same faith has accomplished things that were humanly impossible through the life and prophetic ministry of Ellen White, a weak human being without a primary education. She was able to become not only a powerful preacher, strong advocate for church organization, valued counselor, and a leading advocate for health, education, and publishing, but also the most translated woman writer in the history of literature, who wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books.

If God could use her, why not you? If He opened the mouth of Ellen White—who could not speak a clear word in public because of her shyness—to preach to thousands, He can enable you to speak for Him, too. If God could use her weak and poorly-educated hand to write more than 50,000 pages of His messages to the church, He can use you to bless others, too. The love that

she had for her personal Savior, who first loved her, and the full commitment she made to Him and His work transformed her life and ministry. She knew the sacrificed Lamb of God personally, and you can know Him personally, too.

Have you put your faith wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you loved Him with your whole heart, mind, and soul? Have you reflected this love to others around you? God in Jesus Christ showed us what such love looks like! Many Adventist pioneers reflected this love, also. You can do this, too, by looking to the Lamb of God who revealed God's loving character to us.

THE LAMB OF GOD IS MINISTERING

After Christ's resurrection and ascension to heaven, His followers throughout the centuries have been eagerly waiting for His return, because He promised to come again (John 14:1-3). This sure promise sustained the faith of millions of martyrs—the first-century Christians, the Waldenses, John Huss, Reformers like John Wycliffe and Martin Luther, and many others. This promise initiated the great Christian awakening at the beginning of the 19th century and moved William Miller and his followers to preach the blessed hope of Christ's soon coming. After devoting his life to Bible study, Miller concluded that Christ was to return about the year 1843. Others later narrowed the time down to a specific date, to correspond with the time of the Jewish Day of Atonement, since the prophecy of 2300 years in Daniel 8:14 had to do with the cleansing of the sanctuary. Thus Miller and a great number of the message's supporters, including Joseph Bates, James White and Ellen Harmon (White after marriage), were truly waiting for Christ's return, especially on October 22, 1844—the day that the Millerites established from their study of the Bible prophecies. However, Christ did not come on that date! The believers had to go through a bitter-sweet experience, as Revelation 10:8-10 had predicted. The sweetness was their precious Bible study, and the waiting, rejoicing, and preaching of the good news; while the bitterness was their tasting of the great disappointment when the Christ they had so eagerly awaited did not come.

Today we may ask questions like, "What does all this have to do with us, or even just with me?" and "How can we connect the Millerites' disappointment with the beautiful message about the Lamb of God?" These are valid questions. The answers relate strongly to our Christian standing and faith today. Let us briefly unfold the answers in two parts.

First of all, we need to remember that after His ascension Jesus entered the heavens and became the "High Priest" (Heb 4:14-16) who intercedes for His people and ministers for His church through the Holy Spirit from God's heavenly sanctuary. The Apostle Paul describes Jesus as the "Mediator between God and men" (1 Tim 2:5). In other words, He is the one who has presented the people's praises, prayers, and confessions to the Father. Most Christians agree with this.

However, we also need not to forget that the earthly sanctuary had two apartments: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. With Christ's ascension, He entered the first apartment or the Holy Place. But He entered the Most Holy Place only in 1844. The Lamb of God became not only our daily Mediator but also the High Priest.

The ultimate conclusion of Miller and other believers was based on Daniel 8:14, “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.” They had been correct in their calculations concerning the time that this prophecy would end, for they were faithful students of the Bible and history. Millerites were waiting for Christ’s literal return at the end of this prophetic period, but instead of returning, Christ started the judging or the cleansing process in the second apartment, which was represented in ancient Israel by the ministry of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The Millerite Adventists were right concerning the timing, but they were mistaken about the event to take place. The sanctuary that Daniel spoke of was not the earth itself, the earthly sanctuary, or the Temple of the Israelites, but rather the sanctuary in heaven. The book of Hebrews makes this very clear. It says, “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24).

After the darkest part of the night comes the brightness of the morning. This is true in both the physical and the spiritual realms. On the next day after the great disappointment, God helped Hiram Edson, who was one of those who were waiting, come to an understanding that dried the tears from the eyes and cheeks of a group of Millerites and made their faith even stronger. While Edson was passing through a large field on his way to encourage others, he suddenly stopped. As he would later tell it, heaven seemed to open to his view, and he saw distinctly and clearly that instead of Christ coming out of the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days (representing years) on October 22, 1844, He for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of the sanctuary. Christ had a work to perform in the Most Holy Place before coming to this earth.

This unusual experience encouraged the small group of Adventists who went back to their Bible study and prayers and thus were encouraged in their spiritual journey. With the correct view of the ministry of the Lamb of God, they could see the reason for their disappointment, even as they held onto their previous beliefs on other prophecies and doctrines. They realized that their disappointment had come not from any failure of God to keep His promise, but because they misunderstood the operation of the antitypical service in the heavenly sanctuary. The biblical truth about the sanctuary, including the High Priestly ministry of Jesus in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, not only shed light on the path for our pioneers, but also became one of the major pillars of faith for Seventh-day Adventists, one that distinguishes us from other denominations. It is a truth that Ellen White wrote about at length in several chapters of her book, *The Great Controversy*.

Satan has been attacking this pillar furiously. He has every reason to do so today, because the main point of it is the beauty of the slain Lamb of God who is alive today. Through His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, this Lamb takes away our sins and clothes us with the robes of His righteousness. His service there applies His death, resurrection, and perfect life to every penitent soul.

The Millerites were disappointed when Jesus did not return when they expected, but God made the truth of the matter clear in a little while. No matter what disappoints you in your spiritual journey, whether personal disbelief, unjustified criticism from your family and friends, sickness, loss of finances or a job, or whatever it may be, remember that the safest way is to continue to

trust God and wait for His revelation. Keep on reading the Bible and praying! Jesus Christ has not made mistakes, and He will vindicate your trust in Him, for “he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt 10:22). Do you believe this? How does Jesus make the difference in your life? Remember that the Lamb of God is still in His heavenly sanctuary to make your life meaningful and beautiful, and to see you through to His kingdom!

THE LAMB OF GOD IS COMING BACK

The plan of salvation that God had worked out before the creation of this world would not be complete if it merely told us about the Lamb of God who died for us and who is interceding for us. Both of these truths are wonderful, but by themselves they do not tell us of an end to the terrible problem of sin. So we can be thankful that the Bible is not silent about the rest of the story. It tells us that the Lamb of God is coming back, but this time not as a humble sacrificial Lamb to be offered for sins of the world. He is coming as the One who has “the keys of Hades and Death” (Rev 1:18). In other words, He is coming to put the final end to the destruction sin has inflicted on this earth—to do away with sickness and death. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:53).

There are too many cases of heart attacks, cancer, AIDS, Ebola, and numerous other diseases in this world; too many people die every day because of war, terrorism, disasters, accidents, and numerous other causes. Even one such instance is too many! Yet people suffer everywhere; maybe you are one of them. But Jesus said: “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28). Do not be discouraged. Let your faith in God become stronger with every passing day, because Christ is coming back!

Faith in the Lamb of God, who is coming to take His people to be where He is, has sustained the faithful throughout the ages and given them power to stand to the very end. The Adventist pioneers and their forerunners died in faith so that the Gospel truth would reach us. For example, Charles Fitch was one of the most beloved and successful Millerite preachers. He designed the well-known 1843 prophetic chart, which was so widely used by other preachers who were proclaiming Christ’s soon return. As a committed and enthusiastic evangelist, Fitch was not afraid even to step into icy-cold water and baptize people at the beginning of October, when northern cold and chill get to the very bones. Several groups came to him, one after another, to be baptized, and he wanted each person to enter the kingdom of God. For him, Christ was coming in a matter of days. There was no time for a delay. Not surprisingly, this faithful Adventist preacher got sick with pneumonia after that experience, and he died less than two weeks before the expected return of Christ in all His glory. He fell asleep in faith, confident that his Savior would resurrect him very soon. This is living faith. While we do not need to invite sickness and trouble upon ourselves, we should be strong in believing the biblical truth and proclaiming it to others—that the One who paid the price for our sin is ministering for us in the Most Holy Place and is coming back for His redeemed ones. This is the kind of faith that God looks for in you and me.

Ellen G. White described the glorious return of Jesus: “When Christ shall come to the earth again . . . every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him. In the place of a crown of thorns, He

will wear a crown of glory—a crown within a crown. In place of that old purple kingly robe, He will be clothed in raiment of whitest white, ‘so as no fuller on earth can white them’ (Mark 9:3). And on His vesture and on His thigh a name will be written, ‘King of kings, and Lord of lords’ (Revelation 19:16)” (*The Desire of Ages*, 739).

Is this message a part of your being? Have you lived your life in full anticipation of Christ’s soon return? While the whole universe, knowingly or unknowingly, is waiting for the King of kings and Lord of Lord to come, get ready—and do it now.

CONCLUSION

We have looked at the journey of the Lamb of God and His ministry to the godly people throughout centuries. Especially, we have noticed His Day of Atonement ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as High Priest that started on October 22, 1844. This message presents Christ in all His beauty and gives us hope and encouragement in our daily journey. The Lord guides us to the sure future and allows us to see others and ourselves through the lens of God’s unending love because:

- The Lamb of God desires the best sacrifice—our life!
- The Lamb of God revealed the loving character of God!
- The Lamb of God is still in His heavenly sanctuary to make our life beautiful!
- The Lamb of God is coming back as the King of kings and Lord of lords!

Let His name be glorified in the church and in your personal life today, so that all of us may join the choir of the heavenly beings by singing: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev 5:12).