**IN BETWEEN TWO CROSSES**

**(Luke 23:32-47)**

 In 2008, OKC businessman Clay Bennett brought the newly acquired Seattle Supersonics to OKC. The move required a name change. As I recall, fans were encouraged to submit suggestions for the new team name.

 In the summer of last year, it was announced that Enid would be getting an indoor football team, and a contest was held to name the team. Enid residents were asked to submit names for the new team. The person whose name was chosen would win tickets or t-shirts. We are the Enid Flying Aces.

 There is a great deal of psychology that goes into a team name. Often, the name of an animal is chosen. Usually, the animal is ferocious, terrifying, deadly. The idea is to choose something that will evoke fear in the hearts of your opponent.

 Of the 32 teams in the NFL, about half have the name of an animal. Some are named after big cats—the Lions, the Panthers, the Jaguars, the Bengals. Some are named after birds—the Eagles, the Seahawks, the Ravens, the Cardinals. Now, a little red cardinal does seem all that scary. That may be why they have never won a Super Bowl.

 But then, again, neither have the Lions, the Panthers, the Jaguars, or the Bengals.

 Here is a tip: If you ever get a chance to name an NFL team, don’t name the team after an animal regardless of how terrifying you think it is. While half of the teams are named after animals, the other half are named after occupations and various people.

 I did a little research this past week. I went through a list of all 53 Super Bowls that have been played since the inception of the Super Bowl in 1967. I discovered that of the 53 games, 40 of them have been won by a team bearing a name that describes a human, and only 13 of those games were won by a team with an animal name.

 Only one animal-named team has more than two Super Bowl wins—the Broncos with three, but the Redskins have 3, the Packers have 4, as do the Giants, the Cowboys have won 5, the 49ers 5, the Steelers 6, and the Patriots have emerged the winner in 6 out of 11 Super Bowl appearances.

 I have to admit that one of those 40 wins was by a team that, honestly, doesn’t describe a human. It is an object—the Jets, but jets are made by humans and flown by people. Jets are not made or flown by people; so, I put that win on the human side.

 While animal names are popular, there are some that just would never work because they would fail to evoke the fear you want your opponent to have. That is why no team would ever call themselves the Kittens or the Puppies or the Hamsters. When you stride on to the field of battle, you want to the fans of the opposing team to say, “Oooh,” not “Awww.”

 How does Scripture portray Jesus? He is called the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. He is shown in Revelation 19 as returning to this Earth on a white horse wearing a robe dipped in blood. A horse is what the kings of the ancient world rode when they came in war against their enemy.

 Today, Christians throughout the world are celebrating what we call Palm Sunday—it commemorates the day Jesus came to Jerusalem for the last time and marks the beginning of Passion Week that ended with His death on the cross.

 Jesus did not come riding into Jerusalem atop a horse. He came riding a lowly donkey. The donkey is what a king would ride when he came in peace to a city.

 Amazingly, the most oft-used animal representation of Jesus was not a lion or some other scary animal. It was a lamb. Throughout the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, the Messiah is consistently portrayed as a lamb. A lamb is not terrifying. A lamb does not evoke fear. Yet the Lamb and all those who are on His side will emerge victorious. Listen to these verses:

* Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:15-16).
* And they [believers] overcame him [Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony (Revelation 12:11).
* These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings (Revelation 17:14).
* The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Why does Scripture refer to Jesus as a lamb? We are going to look at that today.

 Last week we considered what God did in between two gardens, the Garden that was and the Garden that will be, the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Heaven, our eternal home. Between those two gardens, God waged and won a war. He waged that war against Satan, and He won it on our behalf.

 Today, we will concern ourselves with what Jesus did between two crosses. On the day Jesus died, three crosses had been erected. Jesus was nailed to the center cross. On either side of him were criminals who had done something worthy of capital punishment. On one side of Jesus was a man who was unrepentant. He cursed his crucifiers, and he mocked Jesus. On the other side of Jesus was a man who confessed his sinfulness and who confessed that Jesus was both a King and one who was innocent, that Jesus had committed no crime. He asked Jesus to remember Him.

 Let’s read what happened—Luke 23:32-49. Instead of going through this passage verse-by-verse, as I would normally do, I want to bring out several themes. Three people died that day, and although they died by the same means, they died three very different deaths.

 **One man died in sin.** He was the unrepentant man.

 **One man died to sin.** He was the one who asked Jesus to remember him.

 **One man died for sin**—sin not His own, but for the sin of all who would trust Him. That is what a lamb would do in the Jewish faith. A lamb would die for sin, for sin not his own.

 The night before Jesus was crucified, Jesus ate with His disciples, but it was no ordinary meal. It was a celebratory meal that Jewish families had eaten for many centuries before and which they have observed for all the centuries since. It is called Passover.

 The meal is used to remember how God had protected the Israelites and freed them from their bondage in Egypt. God had sent them a deliverer named Moses. Again and again, Moses went to the Pharaoh and delivered God’s message, “Let my people go.” Again and again, Pharaoh refused. With each refusal, God sent a plague upon the Egyptians. The tenth and last plague was the sending of the Death Angel. The Death Angel would go through all the land, and the first-born of every family, both man and beast, would die.

 God instructed Moses, however, to tell the people to kill a lamb, and to take the blood of that lamb and to smear it on the door posts and the top frame of the door. That night as the Death Angel moved through the land, whenever he saw the blood of a lamb on the doorposts, he would pass over that house and no harm would come to anyone instead that house. They were covered and protected by the blood of the lamb.

 Fourteen plus centuries later, when John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching, he cried out, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

 After that meal which Jesus had with His disciples, Jesus spent some time praying to His Father. In that prayer, He said: “I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do” (John 17:4). Jesus spoke confidently knowing that the work He had been given would actually be fulfilled the very next day when He would hang upon a cross paying for the sin of all who would trust Him.

 On that cross, Jesus spoke seven times. We read three of the things He said in our passage—Luke 23. There is another thing He said that I want to bring to your attention. We read in John 19:30 that Jesus said, “It is finished.” He was saying “The work You gave Me to do has been completed.”

 In the Greek language, it is one word—*tetelestai.* In that culture, when a servant was given an assignment by his master, he would go and complete the task. When he had done so, he would return to His master and say, “Tetelestai.” He was saying, “It is done. It is completed. It is finished.”

 Also, if a person bought something on credit, when he returned and paid off the debt, he would receive a receipt. On the receipt, the merchant would write, “Tetelestai.” It meant, “The payment has been made in full.”

 On the cross, Jesus cried, “Tetelestai! I have done what I was given to do; the payment for man’s sin had be made in full. There is nothing left undone. There work has been completed. They payment has been made.”

 What happened between those two crosses? Let me make two simple statements back them up with a few passages of Scripture.

1. **In Between Two Crosses, Jesus Took on**

 **Our Sin.**

 Listen to the testimony of 1 Peter 2:14. Peter wrote, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree.” On that cross, Jesus took upon Himself all the sin, shame, and wickedness of every one of every age who would one day trust Him.

 What Paul wrote agrees with what Isaiah wrote in the 8th century BC. More than 700 years before Jesus, Isaiah wrote of someone to come. He portrayed Him as a suffering servant in Isaiah 53. We are going to look at this passage more in-depth tonight, but I want you to note a couple of verses right now. Look at Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12.

 Paul was even more emphatic. Jesus did more than just carry our sin. Let me read 2 Corinthians 5:21 from the NIV, “God made Him who had no sin **to be sin** for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” What an amazing thought! The One who was God incarnate became sin incarnate! He became sin in the flesh.

 I told you that Jesus spoke seven times from the cross. Three of those statements are in our text. I also told you what Jesus said in John 19:30, “It is finished.” Let me add one more saying of Jesus from the cross. It may be the most heart-wrenching. In Matthew 27:46 Jesus prayed to His Father, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?”

 God turned His back on His own Son. The reason He did so is that the Holy God cannot look upon sin, and on the cross, Jesus became the embodiment of every sin and perversion and unrighteousness. Every sinful act you have ever done, every sinful thought you have ever had, and every sinful word you have ever spoken was laid upon Jesus while He was on the cross. God could no longer look upon His Son.

 A few years back, the author Philip Yancey wrote a book, and in it he retells a story originally told by Henri Nouwen. Nouwen was a Catholic priest, author, and professor. For a time, he lived in Paraguay. While there, he met a family. The father was a doctor who spoke out against the military regime there and its human rights abuses. Local police took their revenge on him by arresting his teenage son and torturing him to death. The townsfolk were enraged. They wanted to turn the boy’s funeral into a huge protest march, but the doctor chose another means of protest. At the funeral, the father displayed his son’s body as he had found it in the jail—naked, scarred from electric shocks and cigarette burns, and beatings. All the villagers filed past the corpse, which lay not in a coffin but on the blood-soaked mattress from the prison. It was the strongest protest imaginable because it put injustice on grotesque display.

 Yancey pointed out: Isn’t that what God did at Calvary? On the cross, Jesus’ body was naked and marked with scars. It had been exposed to all the violence and injustice of this world. The cross both reveals what kind of world we have and what kind of God we have: a world of gross unfairness and a God of sacrificial love.

 Jesus took on your sin. There is a second thing Jesus did between those two crosses.

1. **In Between Two Crosses, Jesus Took Away Our Sin.**

 Listen to what we find in Hebrews 9:26, “But as it is, He [Jesus] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

 Look with me at 1 John 3:5, “You know that He appeared in order to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin.”

 Jesus removes our sin from us as far as the east is from the west. It is forever removed from us.

  Theologian and author N.T. Wright re-tells a story about an archbishop who was hearing the confession of three rowdy teenagers in the church. All three boys were trying to make a joke out of it; so, they met with the archbishop and confessed to a long list of ridiculous and terrible sins that they had not committed. It was all a joke to them.

 The archbishop, seeing through their bad practical joke, played along with the first two who ran out of the church laughing. But then he listened carefully to the third prankster, and before he got away, the archbishop told the young man, “Okay, you have confessed these sins. Now, I want you to do something to show your repentance. I want you to walk up to the far end of the church, and I want you to look at the picture of Jesus hanging on the cross, and I want you to look at His face and say, ‘You did all that for me and I don’t care that much.’ And I want you to do that three times.”

 Following orders, the boy went up to the front, looked at the picture of Jesus and said, “You did all that for me and I don’t care that much.” And then he said it again. He tried to say it the third time, but he couldn’t. He broke down in tears.

 The archbishop who originally told the story said, “The reason I know that story is that I was that young man.”

 You see, there is something about the cross. There is something powerful about Jesus dying there for us between those two crosses. We can’t fully grasp it, but somehow it grasps us, and it won’t let us go.

 Have you been grasped by the powerful love of the Lamb? It is only because of His love that He took on your sin, and He took it away.

 Trust Him. Return His love for you with your love for Him.