

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino
John 1:19-34
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Jesus, the Lamb of God

Who went home after service last week and immediately did their homework? Anyone eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch to solidify their understanding of the holy Triune nature of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit? We did! Like I said, the analogy isn't perfect, but it sort of sticks! Ha, ha.

This morning we continue our learning in John's Gospel. And as I sat down to write, I couldn't help but remember a very sad encounter I had with two young Mormons who showed up on my doorstep one day. You've got to give Mormons credit for boldly evangelizing their faith going door to door to share what they consider "Good News."

I invited them in for conversations. I began by asking both of them to tell me how they had come to the Mormon faith. Both had been raised in Protestant Mainline churches, one Presbyterian and one Episcopal. What struck me was that both said that through all their years of being in the church, no one had never really told them about Jesus. It wasn't until they had become Mormons that they had come to put their faith in Him.

This broke my heart. Folks, how can we as a Church neglect the most important thing we could possibly share?

Jesus.

So I vowed that should never happen here at Cascades. People might walk away from practicing their faith, reject the truths we share, or even take a hiatus from the Church altogether. That we cannot control. But what we can control is making sure our folks always know who Jesus is and the difference He makes in our lives.

Our job, like that of John the Baptist's, is to proclaim...to point people to Jesus, so that we become lesser and He becomes greater.

Open up your bibles to John 1:19-34 and we hear how John the Baptist fulfilled his calling to Prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. I will be reading from Eugene Peterson's modern day paraphrase *The Message*. Listen now for the Word of the Lord.

19-20 When Jews from Jerusalem sent a group of priests and officials to ask John who he was, he was completely honest. He didn't evade the question. He told the plain truth: "I am not the Messiah."

21 They pressed him, “Who, then? Elijah?”

“I am not.”

“The Prophet?”

“No.”

22 Exasperated, they said, “Who, then? We need an answer for those who sent us. Tell us something—anything!—about yourself.”

23 “I’m thunder in the desert: ‘Make the road straight for God!’ I’m doing what the prophet Isaiah preached.”

24-25 Those sent to question him were from the Pharisee party. Now they had a question of their own: “If you’re neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet, why do you baptize?”

26-27 John answered, “I only baptize using water. A person you don’t recognize has taken his stand in your midst. He comes after me, but he is not in second place to me. I’m not even worthy to hold his coat for him.”

28 These conversations took place in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing at the time.

29-31 The very next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and yelled out, “Here he is, God’s Passover Lamb! He forgives the sins of the world! This is the man I’ve been talking about, ‘the One who comes after me but is really ahead of me.’ I knew nothing about who he was—only this: that my task has been to get Israel ready to recognize him as the God-Revealer. That is why I came here baptizing with water, giving you a good bath and scrubbing sins from your life so you can get a fresh start with God.”

32-34 John clinched his witness with this: “I watched the Spirit, like a dove flying down out of the sky, making himself at home in him. I repeat, I know nothing about him except this: The One who authorized me to baptize with water told me, ‘The One on whom you see the Spirit come down and stay, this One will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ That’s exactly what I saw happen, and I’m telling you, there’s no question about it: *This* is the Son of God.”

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

As we approach this text this morning, I want to address several topics. We’ll see how John’s self-understanding clearly helped him convey to others who he was and who he was not. We’ll hear his most significant declaration of who Jesus is as the Lamb of God and the Son of Man and what those fully mean. We’ll learn how John received this revelation. And finally we will discuss some important applications for our own lives.

Before we dive in, I want address this contingency who have been sent out from Jerusalem to the desert along the Jordan River where John the Baptist was baptizing. John describes them as “The Jews.” We will hear of them often

throughout the Gospel of John and it is important that we don't get them confused as to who they were. John was NOT describing Jewish people in general, but a specific group sent out from within the religious hierarchy of priests, scribes, Pharisees, and teachers of the law. In other words, this group called "The Jews" was the religious and political power structure challenged by this unauthorized teacher who drew massive crowds away from Jerusalem and called people to repentance for the forgiveness of their sins.

This was troublesome for this group for two reasons. Firstly they couldn't control orthodoxy and what John the Baptist was teaching. And secondly, that many people abandoning the temple sacrificial system in Jerusalem put a significant drain on their religious coffers. And if you want to get religious people's attention, talk about their money!

I think John the Baptist's testimony beautifully set the stage for announcing Jesus' identity as the Messiah and the Son of God.

Notice how "The Jews" questioned John the Baptist about who he said he was. "Are you the Christ or Messiah? Are you the Prophet Elijah who has returned? Or are you The Prophet?"

First they flat out ask him, "Are you the Christ or Messiah which means "The Anointed One." The Old Testament describes the Messiah as a future king from the line of King David who would reign over Israel forever and ever. The Prophet Isaiah described this person as Wonderful Counselor, Almighty Father, Everlasting God, and Prince of Peace. The Messiah would usher in a new age of justice where Israel's enemies would be defeated once and for all and Israel would be restored to its former glory.

John says clearly, "Nope, not him."

Then they ask, "Are you Elijah?" Elijah was an Old Testament prophet from the 9th century BC who spoke for God, fought against the priest of Baal, and was taken up into heaven without experiencing death. Coming from the Prophecy of Malachi, it was believed that Elijah would return some day before the Day of the Lord that Israel might avert God's wrath.¹ It was also thought that Elijah would anoint the Messiah and reveal his identity to Israel.

Again John says clearly, "Nope, not him."

So they ask, "Are you The Prophet?" The Prophet was mentioned in Deuteronomy who would speak for the Lord to the people. God would put his words in his mouth and he would tell the people everything God commanded of them.²

Yet again, John says clearly, "Nope, not him, either."

¹ Malachi 4:5

² Deuteronomy 18:15-18

“Then who the heck are you?,” the Jew’s demanded.

Then quoting the words of the Prophet Isaiah, John responded “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”³

You see John knew very clearly who he was and who he was not. John understood his role in God’s plan. This humble self-awareness allowed John to focus entirely on his mission of preparing the way for Jesus.

The most significant declaration that John made came the next day when he identified Jesus as The Lamb of God and the Son of God. Both names were chock full of meaning for the Jews.

John says of Jesus who was coming toward him, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” In the temple sacrificial system back then, sacrifices were offered on top of the ark of the covenant containing the Ten Commandments or Old Testament Law. The blood of the sacrifice would shield the sin of broken law from God’s sight and thus atone for people’s sin. Not take away, but atone. Cover.

Notice how John identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The Greek Word used here for takes away is *airo*, like in airplane. It means to take flight, remove, or lift up. It gives this sense that the Lamb of God not only takes on the sin of the world, but removes it entirely from us. What stain of sin we had, is removed and put upon the Lamb. So that God doesn’t look upon our sin or sinfulness, but sees us as righteous and dearly loved children. All because of Jesus.

This is why we proclaim that Jesus is THE Savior of the World. His self-sacrifice was once and for all. Taking away the sin of the world! Jesus saves us from the penalty of death for sin.

One commentator wrote, “Christ is an almighty Savior, a Savior for all [humankind]. He’s taking away the sin of the world. He did not die for the Jews only, but for the Gentile as well as the Jew. He did not suffer for a few people only, but for all [humankind]. The payment that he made on the cross was more than enough to make satisfaction for the debts of all. The blood that He shed was precious enough to wash away [lift up] the sins of all. His atonement on the cross was sufficient for all humankind, though efficient only to those who believe. The sin that He took up and bore on the cross was the sin of the whole world.”⁴

Then John the Baptist said, “I didn’t know this about him until I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed to Israel.” How could he say this? Remember Jesus and John the Baptist were cousins. This is the same John who

³ Isaiah 40:3

⁴ J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of John* (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2019), 18.

was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary's cousin. No doubt John and Jesus grew up together. But Jesus' divinity was shielded from John the Baptist until John had fulfilled the prophecy by baptizing Jesus. At that moment, John said that the Holy Spirit descended from heaven like a dove and remained on Jesus.

In the Synoptic gospel accounts, we hear a voice from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."⁵ John the Baptist must have heard that proclamation which led him to testify, "This is the Son of God." Claiming to be the Son of God was like claiming to be of God or God's self. So in saying this, John was pointing to Jesus' divinity which would have been a blasphemous statement.

Notice how this immediately ended the conversation with the Jews. Nothing else is mentioned about them here. Surely they had heard enough and would take this information back to the Jewish ruling council where they would build their contentious case against John the Baptist and Jesus.

So what? What does this mean for us today and what is the Spirit of God inviting us to apply in our own lives?

The first thing that the Spirit is calling us to is to have a similar humility as John the Baptist. He was not the Christ. But he recognized his role in pointing others to Christ.

Whether we are preaching, working in the nursery, teaching elementary, youth group, or Adult Sunday school, if we aren't pointing others to Jesus we are missing the mark. Let's not play our part raising up another generation of young people who can claim that they never heard of Jesus in our midst. Remember, last week. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. When we see Jesus, we see God! The Gospel is that simple. So tell people about Jesus and the way He has impacted your life.

I know for a fact that without Jesus radically intersecting my life that I would not be here today, be married to my wonderful wife, or have our four awesome children. No, I bet I'd be some rich miserly and grumpy Ebenezer Scrooge.

Secondly, we must depend on Jesus Christ and remember that He alone can take away our sins. We cannot remove them through our own efforts. So let your sins take flight and feel the lightness that comes from being free of sin.

Thirdly, just as John boldly proclaimed what he had seen and heard, we too should share our experiences of God's work in our lives. Our job is to proclaim not convince. The Holy Spirit will help people to believe the words we are sharing.

And finally, John's testimony challenges us to fully embrace Jesus as both the sacrificial Lamb and the divine Son of God.

⁵ Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22

As I end, John the Baptist's testimony today provides a powerful witness to Jesus' identity and mission. It challenges us to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, to depend on Him for the forgiveness of our sins, and to boldly proclaim this truth to others.

So may we too develop a self-awareness of who we are and the roles we play in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. May we point people to Jesus and then step out of the way. And may we trust that people will follow Him, becoming His faithful disciples who will go out and change the world through the way we love others, even our enemies.