

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #8

John 1:19-34

One of the most fascinating things to listen to or watch are court proceedings in which the prosecution is trying to prove someone guilty. I think most of us were enthralled with the O.J. Simpson trial. One of the things the prosecution did to try and prove their point, which I still think they did prove, was to have various people take you step by step through every single event which led to the exact moment they entered the murder story. For example, there was a man who took his dog for a walk. The prosecution wanted to know what he had been watching on TV because that proved the time it happened. The chauffeur was questioned concerning the time he arrived and started to ring the buzzer at the gate. Careful documentation of events would have led any sane jury to the conclusion that O.J. was guilty.

When you come to this section in the Gospel of John, John takes us to the land of the Jews and carefully takes us on a step-by-step, day-by-day account of the first events that pertain to the public life of Jesus Christ. This is precise documentation. His goal is to clearly establish that Jesus Christ was God and to establish that the Jews had enough evidence to accept Christ as such. This careful documentation should lead any sane person to the conclusion that Jesus is God.

In the next verses, the Apostle John gives a detailed account of the first week of Christ's public life as it relates to John the Baptist, as it relates to those who became His disciples and as He began public miracles. Beginning in John 1:19 and continuing through 2:11, John gives us, for the most part, a step-by-step narrative account of the first public week of the life of Jesus Christ: 1) Day One - 1:19-28; 2) Day Two - 1:29-34; 3) Day Three - 1:35-39; 4) Day Four - 1:40-42; 5) Day Five - 1:43-51; 6) Day Six - not known; 7) Day Seven - 2:1-11.

Now you will notice that verse 19 begins with a coordinating grammatical conjunction “and”, which connects us to the preceding context. **What this “and” grammatically means is the Word became flesh and the Word was God and what happens next to John proves it.**

Now this particular section is designed to teach this point:

THE TESTIMONY, THE ACTIVITY AND THE PURPOSE OF THE MAN KNOWN AS JOHN THE BAPTIST CLEARLY PROVE THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS GOD WHO DID COME IN THE FLESH.

The man referred to in the Scripture as John the Baptist was an odd duck to the religious world. John had a legitimate right to be a priest because his father, we may recall, was a priest named Zacharias (Luke 1:5). However, John certainly did not conform to the normal Judaistic idea of a priest. He was totally different. He was a wild-dog sort of a guy who was totally at home in the wilderness. When he came preaching, masses of Jewish people were flocking to see him. John was certainly a non-conformist the religious status quo and as a result some of the Jews were very interested in establishing just what this man was all about. What John ends up proving to them is what and who Jesus Christ is all about. Now there are three key narrative parts to this:

NARRATIVE PART #1 – John is asked by Jewish religious leaders if he is a certain Jewish leader. 1:19-21

The articular noun “the Jews” appears some 71 times in John’s gospel and most of the time it refers to Jewish leadership, which is headquartered in the Temple of Jerusalem (Gary M. Burge, *John*, p. 71).

These religious leaders knew about the supernatural wonders of the sky 30 years prior. They knew there had been a slaughter of babies in Judea by Herod. They sensed something powerful was in the air. Word spread that some special baby had been brought to the temple in Jerusalem thirty years prior and both Simeon and Anna, a woman who had never left the temple (Luke 2:37-38), said that this special baby was the salvation of Israel.

The Jews in Jerusalem were getting jumpy about John. He did turn many Jews toward a true relationship with God (Luke 1:16-17). He was making a sizeable dent in the Jewish people, so a group of Pharisees (1:24), from Jerusalem, sent some priests and Levites to see John, who was at that time in Bethany (1:28), which was a city located a couple miles south of the Sea of Galilee on the east side of the Jordan. This was about a 70 mile trip north of Jerusalem that these religious leaders had to make. This was like a congressional fact-finding committee. The Pharisees wanted to get to the bottom of who John really was. An interrogation committee was sent to question him. Pharisee types are weasels. They get other people to do their dirty work. They sit back and pretend to be right with God, when in all reality they are play-acting phonies.

When they got to John they asked him to confess who he was and he testified that:

Testimony #1 - John testifies that he was not the Christ . 1:20

The name “Christ” is the Greek noun for the Hebrew “Messiah” (John 1:41). Throughout the O.T., a Messiah, a Divine Anointed One was predicted to come to earth, who would deliver Israel. During the 300 years between the O.T. and the N.T., most Jews totally focused on a political deliverance, not a deliverance from their sin problem.

When this contingency asks John if he is the Messiah, it is the ultimate of Jewish questions. Martin Luther said they do flatter John here. John had a golden opportunity to make something of himself. But he very emphatically says in Greek “I am not the Messiah” (εγω ουκ ειμι). This is as emphatic as John can be about this because he uses a pronoun “I” with a verb which also has an “I” in it. Had John said he was the Messiah, the Maccabees would have rallied behind him and started a war with Rome. But John was not Him.

But we may make a good application here - we can’t be on top if Christ is. Either we occupy first place in our life or Jesus does. Either we are increasing or Christ is. John confessed that he was not the Jewish Messiah.

Testimony #2 - John testifies that he was not Elijah . 1:21

This religious committee decides to work through a Jewish checklist of eschatological possibilities. These guys did know their Bibles, but knowing the Bible and knowing Jesus Christ are two different things. Elijah was a prophet who lived 900 years before John, who had been taken from the earth and had not died (II Kings 2:11).

A prophecy in Malachi 4:5 indicates that before the terrible Day of the Lord, Elijah will again appear. One might wonder how we may reconcile a statement about John such as Matthew 11:14 or 17:10-13 with the fact that he denies he is Elijah? The answer is that had the Jews accepted what John was proclaiming, he could have had an Elijah-type affect on them in that they could have been delivered as an individual and a nation. Luke predicted that John would have an Elijah type of ministry (Luke 1:17) in that he would prepare the people for the first coming of the Lord. Elijah will prepare the people for the second coming of the Lord.

Testimony #3 - John testifies that he was not "the" prophet . 1:21b

Deuteronomy 18:15 predicts an eschatological prophet of God will be raised up as a prelude to Israel receiving her land (18:9). Some viewed this prophet as the Messiah. Some viewed him as Jeremiah (Matthew 16:14) and others viewed him as some other O.T. prophet (Matthew 16:14). We know from Revelation 11 that two key prophets will surface during the final judgments of the Tribulation just prior to Israel being delivered. This may be what the Jews had in mind, but regardless John made it clear that he was not "the" eschatological prophet.

When God is using you, you can count on some religious people to question your ability, your education or your identity. When you are influencing others for God, as John was, you can expect to be questioned and criticized, especially if you don't seem to conform to the status quo of religion. If you believe through the Word of God and prayer that life's problems may be solved, there will be those who will criticize you as if you are out of your mind. You stay faithful and keep at your task and you will see God do some great things.

NARRATIVE PART #2 – John is asked by Jewish leaders to identify himself . 1:22-23

These religious scholars hadn't been able to decipher this by their questions, so they finally said, who are you so that we may go back to Jerusalem and tell the Pharisees? John said I am the one Isaiah the prophet predicted in Isaiah 40:3. His job was to announce the arrival of the Lord. His job was to announce to Israel that God was now on earth in the form of a Person. Now John was an important man in the plan of God. **He was the first physical witness to point people to the actual Person Jesus Christ and his witness had been predicted in the O.T.**

There is certainly nothing wrong with thinking factually about yourself, not more highly than you ought to think. Remember, these men questioning John knew their Bibles. They should have said "wow" you are the one predicted to lead us to our Messiah and Savior, but as verse 25 makes clear, they just gloss over this and move on to something else. These are very religious leaders not interested in really knowing the truth. Pharisee types are never interested in really knowing the truth.

John was a voice, a communicator whose job it was to point people straight to Jesus Christ. When the President of the United States appears to speak anywhere, it is customary for one to come before him and publicly announce him. This was also true in New Testament times in the political world. It was customary for a forerunner to announce the pending visit of a dignitary. John was the forerunner, the one whose job it was to prepare things and announce the coming of God into this world. If we are going to be a witness, we must open our mouths and speak words.

If ever there were a man who had the right to vaunt himself, it was John. He was a Nazarite from birth; he never cut his hair, never touched a dead body, never ate grapes or drank from the fruit of the vine. His birth was miraculous; he was a religious ascetic who could survive for years in the wilderness. He could have published a manual for the disciplined spiritual life, but he said, "I am just a voice." In fact, he said, "I am a voice crying out in a wilderness." The wilderness areas of Judea were barren, desolate, dreary, dirty places. You don't make much of a dent in changing a wilderness and you don't produce much fruit in a wilderness. John says this was my job, go through the wilderness of the world and point people to Jesus Christ. This was John's job and this is our job. There is nothing more important that we will ever do than when we are verbally pointing people to Jesus Christ. Even though we probably won't see much fruit or make much of a dent in the world's wilderness, we still are very valuable when we are doing this.

The famed Italian conductor, Arturo Toscanini was known for his precise interpretation of any musical piece he directed. One night he conducted his orchestra in a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. When he was done, the audience clapped, whistled and stamped their feet. When the ovation quieted, Toscanini turned to his musicians and said, "Gentlemen, Gentlemen, I am nothing, you are nothing, but Beethoven is everything." That was the perspective John had and that is the perspective we need. We can't save sinners, we are nothing but a sinner ourselves, but we can point to the One who is everything, Jesus Christ.

NARRATIVE PART #3 – John is asked by Jewish leaders to explain his baptism. 1:25-34

These priests and Levites wanted to know why he was baptizing people if he wasn't the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. Jewish religious leaders baptized Gentiles into the Jewish faith, but they never baptized Jews, which is the prime target of John's baptism (Gary M. Burge, *John*, p. 72).

Now this is a stupid question because he has just informed them he is the one predicted by Isaiah, whose job it was to prepare the way of the LORD. In that regard, he had right to do anything he did. Again, these leaders are not interested in truth, they are upset because people are taking an interest in him.

Now John's baptism is not Christian baptism. John's baptism is not a proselyte baptism. John's baptism was for the purpose of identifying the Messiah. **According to verse 31, God would use John's baptism as a means of revealing His Son to Israel.** John would baptize many Jews and from their perspective they were saying we want to be ready for the Messiah, but when God's Son would actually arrive, the Spirit of God would visibly descend from heaven, signaling to all that this is the Son of God (1:33).

Often you will hear people say “we follow the Lord in Baptism.” We cannot possibly follow Him in His baptism which proves He is Holy God; at best every other baptism shows we are dirty sinners.

I have witnessed many baptisms and have pastorally baptized many people myself and never has a voice come out of heaven, or the Spirit of God come visibly on someone like a dove. Why? Because there is only one Son of God who can take away sins and this baptism signaled him out. John’s baptism would point out the One who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit, not water. John’s baptism was a physical ritual that said a person wanted to change, but Christ’s baptism was the spiritual reality that gave the power to change. We so often call John, John the Baptist, but the REAL baptizer is Jesus, the One who baptizes people with the Holy Spirit.

We may notice that there are certain facts about this brought out:

(Fact #1) - The religious leaders did not know Jesus Christ. 1:26c

Just because one is a religious leader does not mean he actually knows and has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I taught at GRSBM from 1983-1986, and then in 1986, I became pastor of our first church. Five years into that first pastoral ministry, I received a letter from a girl who had cheated on an exam. She was confessing this to me, because she had finally come to faith in Christ. Think of it, she went through school, but did not know Jesus Christ. Think of this, these religious leaders went through all of their training and did not know Jesus Christ.

(Fact #2) - No human is worthy to even untie His shoe. 1:27

Keep in mind that John is a very unique man and prophet in the plan of God, yet he was not worthy to even untie the sandal of Jesus Christ. Untying sandals was typically the job of a servant or slave. So John is basically saying I am not even worthy to be a slave of the sandal on the foot of this One. This is a far cry from the arrogance of those who think they are equal to Jesus Christ and just as good as He is.

A few years ago there was a movement called the “Jesus movement.” That movement made Jesus Christ out to be your beach buddy, who just followed you along through life, not really caring if you ever changed. **Jesus is God and we aren’t even worthy of untying His sandal, let alone touch Him.** This is the way the greatest prophet who ever lived saw Him and this is the way we need to see Him.

(Fact #3) - These events occurred on the other side of the Jordon. 1:28

The exact location of this is still somewhat of a puzzle, but what is not a puzzle is the precision of detail here. Notice the precision here - these are real events, happening at a real time and in a real place. This must have rubbed the leaders the wrong way. This was not fitting in with the ecumenical norm of the religious world. This was not the way they typically did things.

(Fact #4) - John saw Jesus the next day. 1:29

This is day two in John's journal. He was questioned on day 1 and here is what happens on day 2.

Augustine said there were three things he would have liked to have seen: 1) Solomon in all of his glory; 2) Paul in the pulpit; 3) Jesus Christ in the flesh (Cited from William Van Doren, *John*, p. 84).

John did see Jesus Christ in the flesh and was the first to point Him out. The day after being quizzed by these leaders, John saw Jesus and John viewed Him in four ways:

Way #1 - Jesus is the Lamb of God. 1:29

The Greek text literally reads "the Lamb of the God" (ο αμνος του θεου). This actual phrase "the Lamb of the God" only occurs two times in the N.T. and both are in this chapter - John 1:29; John 1:36. The two articles "the" before the nouns Lamb and God, indicate this is the one and only specific Lamb that needs to be identified because this is the only Divine sacrifice who can take away sin. **This is God's only Lamb.** God predicted through the Prophet Isaiah that He would provide a Lamb who would be led to slaughter, because all of us sheep had gone astray (Isaiah 53). This is God's Lamb slaughtered to save you. Just as soon as you believe on Jesus Christ, you will instantly see this Lamb differently. You will elevate your worship to a level that says "worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive all Divine Glory and Honor because He is God."

Way #2 - Jesus is the One who can take away sin. 1:29b

The other lambs could only cover up sin and that is why so many had to be sacrificed so often. This is the only Lamb who can take sin away. The verb "take away" (αιρω) is one that means to take away and remove it by carrying it away. Jesus Christ literally is One who continually takes your sin on Himself and carries it away and removes it. This is the only One who can take away the sin of the world. This is the only One who can wash the stain away. That is exactly how John saw Him and this is the greatest prophet to ever live.

No matter what your sin, Christ has bore than sin on the cross and if you will believe on Jesus Christ, He will wash all your sin away. The present tense means Jesus is the One who can continually take away your sin as one grammarian observed, He is the only means of continual justification and the only means of continual sanctification. We have continual sin that needs to be removed from us and taken away and Jesus Christ is the only One who can do that.

He will take away all your condemnatory sin if you will believe on Him and He will take away a believer's sin that breaks fellowship with God if you will confess your sin to Him. **Jesus Christ will keep you out of hell and keep you in fellowship with God by taking away your sin.**

Way #3 - Jesus is One with a higher rank than John. 1:30a

Remember in the mind of God no man held a higher rank than John. The prediction of Isaiah makes John the most important man alive. His job is to announce to the world that God has come into the world.

Way #4 - Jesus is One who existed before John. 1:30b

How is that possible since John was born six months before Jesus? Jesus was eternal and existed prior to His coming into this world.

This is what John said about Jesus.

(Fact #5) - John saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus. 1:31-33

O.T. Israel expected the Messianic era would feature a wonderful work of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 36:26-27; 37:14). In the O.T. times, it was not uncommon for the Holy Spirit to come upon someone giving them special enabling power to lead and serve. This happened to Sampson, to Saul and to David. But no one had ever seen anything like what John saw at this Baptism of Jesus Christ. He saw the Spirit descend upon Him. John actually saw this with his own eyes. John had baptized many Jewish people, but he never saw anything like this.

Martin Luther said he enjoyed watching birds. He said a bird is totally dependent on God for everything. It depends on God for air currents, for food, for water, for materials to build nests. In fact, Luther once named a bird "Teacher" because it taught him to totally trust in God. That is what the Spirit of God does when it comes into a person. It teaches that person to totally trust in Jesus Christ for spiritual life.

(Fact #6) - John specifically says Jesus is the Son of God. 1:34

What you have here is eyewitness testimony from the greatest prophet to ever live. Will you accept the fact of an eyewitness that Jesus is God?

People are looking for someone, for something to give them security in life. There is only One who can give this security. There is only One who can satisfy your needs and that One is Jesus Christ.

Two questions:

1. Do you have an openness to learn God's Word or are you a close-minded Pharisee steeped in religion?
2. Do you witness for Jesus Christ and point people to Jesus Christ?