

March 9, 2014
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 1:29-34.

1. Explain the difference between the kind of person the religious people were looking for and the kind of person John introduced as “the Lamb.”
2. What are several significant reasons for Jesus being called the Lamb?
3. What is the greatest value of Christ’s blood?
4. What did John mean when he said that he didn’t know Jesus?

THE LAMB OF GOD John 1:29-34

John didn’t quite fit in his society. It is possible that he was part of a group called the Essenes. They were a separatist party. They looked for Messiah, trusting God to keep all the promises He made through the Old Testament prophets. They, like all the other people in first century Israel, did not have an error-free understanding of all that “Messiah” meant. But they did have a love for God that caused them to swim upstream in the world’s river of religions.

John was found living in the desert eating odd food, wearing strange clothes, and saying things that hadn’t been heard in over 400 years in Israel. He was talking about the Kingdom of heaven being at hand. He said that the people needed to repent of sin. He even baptized people who agreed with him. Contrary to common sense expectations,

God made John the oddball quite popular. Hoards of people went out to hear him preach and many of them took their stand with him. No wonder the religious leaders wondered. Who was this guy? Why was he doing this? What made him tick?

One day while John was doing ministry, Jesus showed up. John pointed Him out to the crowd and explained that when he finally understood who Jesus was, he also understood God’s plan for his life. John’s knowledge of Jesus made him so bold that it cost him his life. I think that is the way it is supposed to be for all of us who champion His name.

Behold the Lamb of God (vv.29-20)

When the preacher John saw Jesus, he introduced Him as the Lamb of God. *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him (v.29a)*. In this part of John’s account, he presented activity in a four-day period beginning with the inquisition by the priests and Levites and ending with Jesus’ initial call of four disciples (Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael). Much had happened regarding John the Baptist’s association with Jesus up to this point.

He had been preaching and baptizing in the wilderness for some time. Probably about a couple of months earlier, Jesus had come from Nazareth to the wilderness where John baptized Him (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11). We know that after the baptism, the Holy Spirit led Jesus out to the wilderness where He spent forty days fasting and being tempted by Satan (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13). At about the time Jesus was coming out of the wilderness, the religious leaders in Jerusalem had sent a delegation of priests and Levites to question John. Then the day after those representatives asked their questions, Jesus showed up.

John told the people who He was. *And said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (v.29b)*. Part of John’s introduction was an answer to the questions he had fielded the day before. John had explained to the religious leaders who he was or, more accurately, who he was not. They wanted to know if he was the Christ sent from God to rule as King (1:20). John assured them he was not. They wanted to know if he was Elijah sent from God to establish social justice (1:21). No, that wasn’t John either. Then they wondered

if he was the Prophet sent from God to bring new revelation and new teaching (1:21).

Those were all interesting questions, but it leaves us to wonder if no one was looking for the Lamb sent from God. Of all people, the priests and Levites who slaughtered thousands of lambs for sacrifice each year should have been looking for the promised Lamb. Obviously, they did not understand the need for God's Lamb. They should have because God revealed this concept, this need for the sacrificed lamb, from the beginning of time. The first sacrifice because of sin was an animal of some kind whose life was taken to provide clothing for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). But we cannot be sure that was a lamb. The first act of worship recorded was Abel sacrificing a lamb from his flock in obvious obedience to God (Gen. 4:4). Many years later, Abraham believed that God would provide for Himself the Lamb on the mount of the Lord (Gen. 22:8,14). In Moses' day, God required a lamb to be sacrificed at the first Passover (Exo. 12). The law God gave through Moses required thousands of lambs to be slain for sins year after year. God's principle about a sacrificed lamb is so plain throughout Scripture that the writer to the Hebrews concluded, *Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22).*

But the religionists in John's day were not looking for a sacrifice to purge away their sins. As Solomon concluded, "There is nothing new under the sun." The principle remains the same today. People are satisfied with religious activity, the sense of belonging to something "churchish," or doing good deeds that smack of love for fellow man. Millions of people in the middle east and Asia are satisfied still to try to gain pardon from sin by killing thousands of animals for sacrifice each year.

Jesus came from the wilderness of temptation and John introduced Him as God's Lamb to take away the sins of the world. How that should have excited the people who heard because this Lamb had been promised throughout Scripture. Author Arthur Pink pointed out that Jesus the Lamb was typified by Abel's sacrifice (Gen. 4). He was promised by Abraham (Gen. 22). He was personified in Isaiah as the prophet wrote, *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like*

a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:7). He was identified by John (John 1:29). He is magnified in heaven. John the apostle, *looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:11-12).* And He will be glorified forever (Rev. 22:1).

John told the people that this Lamb's blood is sufficient to pay for the sins of the world. That is an incredible idea, but it does not teach universalism. It is instructive to follow the application of the lamb's blood through Bible history. First the blood of a lamb was applied to an individual named Abel. Second the blood of lambs was applied to whole households in the Passover. Third, the blood of a lamb was applied to a whole nation on the Day of Atonement. Now John declared that the blood of **THE LAMB** is sufficient to remove the stain of all the sins of the whole world. This is a more specific use of the term *cosmos* in which John narrowed it down to referring to the sinning people instead of the whole creation. While Christ's blood is sufficient to this end, it is not efficacious to that end. In spite of the fact that Christ's blood is sufficient to cover their sins, many people will go to hell bearing the guilt for the sins which they have not acknowledged (Mat. 7:13). Few will have their sins forgiven (Mat. 7:14).

And yet the invitation remains. The Apostle John wrote in his first letter. *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).* That is the invitation of eternity. Accepting it or rejecting it will have ramifications for eternity.

While he introduced Jesus the Lamb, John affirmed that the Lamb came before him. *This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me" (v.30).* He was a man who ranked before John. This is the third time, according to John the Apostle's account, that the Baptist insisted that Jesus

outranked him (1:15,27,30). Matthew, Mark, and Luke also pointed out that John preached that Jesus who came after him was mightier than he was. Luke wrote it like this: *As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:15-17).* That last verse sounds ominous. But it was actually very good news. Read the next verse in the context. *So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people (Luke 3:18).*

In a somewhat literal translation of the Greek, John would have said, "This is Him of whom I said, 'after me is coming man who has become in front of me because He was before me.'" The wording means that Jesus overtook John's authority. That is what the promised King ought to do. The herald expected the king whom he paved the way for to eclipse him when he showed up. Heralds were not the kings. They were the announcers of the kings.

But maybe the most striking part of John's introduction is the fact that he called the Lamb a **man** who came before him. Notice that John emphasized the humanity of God the Son. Jesus from Nazareth was a man who was born after John was, but who overtook John in might and authority because He existed before John did. How can that be? That's not normal!

This is the Son of God (vv.31-34).

God the Father and God the Holy Spirit revealed Him (vv.31-33). John was simply the mouthpiece. He was the voice of one crying. John knew what God called him to do. He confessed, *I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel (v.31).* John did indeed baptize many with water. Why? What was he indicating? Surely God had revealed to him that he was to identify people with repentance from sin. John preached "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2). Many people went to John, confessed their sins publicly, and were

baptized in order to declare their identification with the message of repentance. But John also knew that his baptism with water did not compare with the baptism with the Holy Spirit that God the Son would bring with Him. According to Matthew's account, John confessed, *"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11).* That ministry of Jesus Christ became very obvious at the Feast of Pentecost after He ascended to the Father.

John understood that he was doing exactly what God determined he should do. But probably there were times when he wondered why. That is the nature of a servant of the Lord confident in God's calling. He or she has a clear conscience about the Lord's will for his or her life, but we don't always understand why. God often accomplishes the greater purpose in our ministry as an aside, something unexpected.

God's plan was for John's water baptism to reveal Christ to the nation. Did he understand how that was going to work out? Maybe not. Nevertheless, John was busy doing what God called him to do, day after day. Then, one day Jesus of Nazareth, John's second cousin, showed up and requested baptism. John had to know that Jesus was the promised Christ because his mother had acknowledged as much to Mary when she stopped by for a visit. Elizabeth told Mary, *"And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43).* That knowledge about Jesus explains why John balked at baptizing Jesus (Mt. 3:14). John was baptizing in reference to confession of sin. Jesus certainly didn't need to repent of sin. Yes, but Jesus did need to identify with the sins of the world for which He was going to pay the price. John conceded and baptized Christ.

At that point, John learned how important his ministry was. Some time earlier, God had informed John about the confirming sign of the Lamb. John acknowledged, *I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (v.33).* So, why did John say twice in this record that he did not know Jesus Christ? Were they not related? Would they not have been together for family gatherings? Not necessarily. John was out in the wilderness for some time, probably some years. But didn't John's mother know that Jesus was the promised Messiah?

It does seem clear that John was acquainted with Jesus. Surely John had heard talk about Jesus being the promised Messiah. But what did that mean, what did that entail? The questions from the priests and Levites prove that they did not share our view of Messiah.

There were many theories about who He would be, what He would do, and what He would do. Maybe even John harbored thoughts of Messiah being the valiant warrior who would restore the physical kingdom of Israel at that time. Whatever he thought, it is obvious that in John's thinking Jesus was the promised Messiah and that He was superior to everyone—including John. But to enjoy intuitive knowledge about all that the incarnation meant escaped John until God made it clear.

John's mind was cleared up when God revealed the confirming sign to him. The apostle wrote, *And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him" (v.32)*. All the other Gospel writers tell the same story. Matthew wrote, *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:13-17)*. Mark wrote virtually the same thing. *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:9-11)*. Luke added a bit more information. *Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22)*.

Therefore, when the Apostle John wrote, he could assume, therefore, that everyone knew what had happened. John testified as an eyewitness that when God kept His promise and revealed Jesus as His unique Son, John was convinced. God the Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove and rested on Jesus. That was a miracle. According to God's promise, that action confirmed that Jesus the man from

Nazareth was co-equal with God the Father (who revealed truth to John) and God the Holy Spirit (who Jesus had power to share).

Because of what God promised and what John experienced, John bore witness that this is the Son of God (v.34). He said, *And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God (v.34)*. John perceived the Son of God. He not only saw the miracle that confirmed Jesus' divinity, but it registered in his mind. It all made sense now. Having seen, having come to the conclusion, it impacted the rest of John's life. He testified to the reality of the Son of God. John gave his life to the reality that Jesus, the man from Nazareth, was equal to God, not that He was a son born to God. The reality that the man, to whom he was related, was God, the second person of the trinity, who exists forever as the Son.

If we have perceived that Jesus is God, how does that affect us? Accepting that truth demands faith. Paul put it like this, *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame" (Romans 10:9-11)*. A lot of people know that passage of Scripture. A lot of people quote it. But a lot of people don't know what it means.

There is often tacit acceptance of the divinity of Jesus. People say they believe it without ever meditating on what they believe. But there is a reason why this doctrine is so hated by "alternative" religions. If Jesus is God, God died to pay the penalty for our sins. That kind of God has the right to expect us to acknowledge our sins to Him and ask forgiveness. When we understand that God forgives our sins and removes all future judgment from us, we will be so thankful that it will affect the way we live. When we live lives of gratitude to God for the mercy He has shown through Jesus, we become very obvious floating in a sea of sinful humanity.

Are we willing to stick out like John did? He lost his head because of it. Olympic champion freestyle skier David Wise loves Jesus. He is not shy about his love for Christ and his desire to serve Him. His love for Christ impacts the way he lives. So while other Olympians might be pictured as free-wheeling, fun-loving, party-going kind of folks, David Wise is pictured as a twenty-three-year-old father

and loving husband. This struck NBC correspondent Skyler Wilder as odd. He headlined his piece about Wise by saying he lives “an alternative lifestyle.” That used to be a term used to describe people who practiced a lifestyle that was outside the boundaries of normal, acceptable morality. Because America is awash in sin, immorality and untethered wickedness, loving Jesus is the “alternative lifestyle.” It is odd. It is weird. It is unacceptable.

When we live in a world that hates God and His truth, our love for the Unique Son of God will identify us as “alternative,” as though a neon arrow pointed down on us all the time. That was John in first century religious Israel. Is it you?