

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!

John 1:19-34

Turn back to John 1...

I read this week about a professor at a Christian university who's found a great way to get acquainted with his new students at the start of each year. – He asks them each to write down two things they love and two things they hate.

Here is one of the top things that his students consistently hate: "fake people". – Anything that hints of being plastic, artificial, or insincere. – They want authentic, raw, broken, flawed, imperfect, transparent.

Just look around at what sells today: 'Real coffee, real food, real clothes, real cars, real furniture.' – And of course, churches jump on the bandwagon: We offer you 'real church with real people'. – 'Not like all those fake churches out there with fake people'?

This quest for authenticity is understandable to a point. – Many secular and government leaders prove to be corrupt liars. – Even worse, church leaders are exposed to be phoney's and pretenders.

People are tired of hypocrisy. – If there is *anywhere* that should be authentic, characterised by truth and reality and walking in the light, it should be Church of Jesus Christ!

However: The focal point of the church is not authenticity. – Like any good thing, authenticity can become an idol. – The focus of our church must not be, 'Look how broken & flawed I am.' –

No, the focus must be, 'Look how great Christ is! He is the perfect, flawless Son of God – He alone can make you whole!'

Nobody understood this better than John the Baptist. – Nobody was a more authentic and real Christian witness than this man. – Yet he didn't spend his time telling people about himself or his brokenness or failures. – He was too consumed with showing them Christ.

Stand & Read & Pray:

Give title....

****TWO of the greatest DAYS in the ministry of the greatest man ever before Christ:***

Jesus would say of John the Baptist in Matt. 11:11, "among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! –

But WHAT was it that made John so great??... His intellect?, no. – His influence?, no. – His godliness?, no. – What made him the greatest prophet of all time was his task, his mission: proclaiming Christ.

The greatness of the One He preached was what made John great. – It was all a borrowed greatness. – Nothing inherent, all derived. – All Christ-centred, Christ-focussed greatness.

NB, it's very rare for the Gospels ever to enumerate each day, except in the Passion Week. – Yet that's what John does for the rest of chp. 1, listing a 5-day sequence. – This must've been a very important week at the outset of Jesus' ministry.

1. vv. 19-28, DAY ONE: 'Christ is Here!' (spoken to enemies)

v. 19 – Here comes the delegation from head office, the 'thought police'.

Realise: After 400 years with no true prophet, no word from God, now there was this man – this radical preacher out in the desert, making huge waves and drawing big crowds, by the tens of thousands probably, from across the land. –

John had probably been preaching for over a year by now. – YET he hadn't exactly gone through all the official channels for authorisation. – So you can imagine the intensity of this interrogation: (v. 19d), "Who *are* you?"

v. 20 – NB, the emphatic language here. – John vigorously refused to accept any messianic labels. – Whatever John was, he first wanted to be explicitly clear about what he was NOT.

v. 21a – Why "Elijah", recycled from 800 yrs. ago?! – Yes, remember: (a) John dressed & ate like the eccentric Elijah; (b) Elijah never died, but was taken up by chariots of fire; (c) Malachi, in the last chp of the OT, prophesied that another Elijah would come before the final Day of the LORD.

So John the Baptist was the most likely candidate for sitting in the 'Elijah chair' that they'd seen in a LONG time.

v. 21b – John was A prophet; but he knew he was not "THE" prophet. – Big difference.

NB, "THE prophet" prophesied in Deut. 18, whom God would raise up like Moses, from among the Jews. – God said, 'I will put My words in his mouth...listen to him.' – The Jews also began to take this to be an end-times kind of (final) prophet.

BUT in both cases, John denies it.

→NB John's brief, short answers here: v. 21, "I am not...No."

Here is a man who clearly does not enjoy talking about himself. – This kind of witness has become a lost breed. – Today we quite enjoy talking about ourselves. – I mean, what could be more interesting?! –

+ Garfield cartoon: 'Odie, I'm tired of talking about me. You talk about me for a while.'

Look again at John's terse answers here: v. 21...

John the Baptist knew he had come, v. 7, "as a witness" – to bear witness "about the Light" (vv. 7-8). – Not about himself, his story, his brokenness, his authenticity, flaws, etc.

→ 2 Cor. 4:5, “For we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.”

~ ‘You cannot at the same time give the impression that you are a great preacher and that Christ is a great Saviour.’ (James Denney)

~ Matthew Henry, “Those speak best for Christ who say least of themselves. ...Those that will *not* deny themselves do in effect deny Christ.” (repeat)

Two strikes so far for the investigative team...

v. 22 – Not looking good so far for their report-back to the big boys in Jerusalem. – ‘John, man, we’re having a hard time getting you to tell us anything about yourself.’

v. 23 – I.e., ‘OK, if you insist, I’ll reach back into Scripture to find my identity. I’ll let the Bible explain me, rather than just my own feelings or opinions.’

NB, John the Baptist here equates Jesus with “the LORD”, Yahweh of the OT. – Yet again we see’s this grand them in John 1, the deity of Christ, now from the lips of John the Baptist.

NB, Jesus was “the Word”; John was just “a voice”, a mouth telling others about “the Word”. – ‘Never mind my face, my name, my title, my rank. Just hear my message. I’m a voice.’ –

John the Baptist, the man who WAS a sermon. – Witnessing was not just what he did; it was who he was.

→ O that Antioch would be a church full of 250 John the Baptists! – O that we would be a choir of 250 voices, known only for the great truth we proclaim. – O that we would be 250 mouths that cannot stop witnessing to the lost, that “cannot stop speaking of what we’ve seen & heard” (Acts 4)!

→ v. 22c, Christian, still this question rings out today, “What do you say about yourself?” – Are you concerned to be seen and have a name? – Or are you just happy to be *heard*, as a faithful “voice”? –

Must we have a face and big titles? – Or are we happy just to be a *mouth*, a faithful messenger who tells of Christ?

1 Cor. 3:5, “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed....”

→ v. 23, What does it mean to “make straight” the Lord’s way? –

+ Ask any road builder today and he will tell you: To build a road, you have to fill in the low spots, bring down the heights, straighten out what is crooked, smooth out what is rough.

SO IT IS with our hearts! – Beloved, the King is coming! – Are you ready to meet Him? – Is your heart a smooth highway, ready to receive Christ?

How are the *roadworks of repentance* going, your 'putting off & putting on', your growth in holiness?...

- Mountains of pride & self-righteousness that need to be flattened?
- Potholes of self-pity and despair to be raised up?
- Crooked paths of sin, impurity, immorality, or deception to be straightened?
- Rough habits of selfishness and disobedience to be smoothed out?...

We must hear afresh the message of Isaiah & of John the Baptist today: v. 23, "Make straight the way of the LORD!"...

v. 24 – O boy, what a hostile crowd: As if the "priests & Levites" (v. 19) weren't enough, there were Pharisees with them too. – The arch-legalists and kings of self-righteousness.

v. 25 – I.e., 'Who authorised you?!' – NB, they knew about baptism. It had become a symbolic ritual for Gentile proselytes converting to Judaism. – And it was normally self-administered. – But now John was doing neither:

He wasn't baptism Gentiles, but Jews?! – And they weren't baptism themselves, but John was doing it?!

How will John answer them?...

v. 26 – NB, 'Christ is here'. – "Among you" = in the land, in town. – In fact, Christ was on His way there as John spoke, about to appear the next day (v. 29). –

Repeat: v. 26b, "Among you stands One whom you do not know."

→ Truer words have ne'er been spoken: Still today, by His Spirit & His Word, Christ is present, right here, at work right now. – His Spirit has convicted you of your sin and need for Him...

You've seen Christ changing others' lives.... Some of your loved ones have come to know Him.... YET still you do not know Him. – Still you treat Him as a stranger. – Still you refuse Him, you ignore Him...

Repeat: v. 26b, "Among you stands One whom you do not know."

You are re-enacting exactly what we read earlier: vv. 10-11...
v. 26b, "Among you stands One whom you do not know."

John the Baptist was saying, 'You should be flocking to Him, praising Him, and bowing before Him in repentance & faith! But instead you are here interrogating me, while Christ is here.'

'He is the fulfilment of OT prophecy, the long-awaited Messiah. He alone can satisfy your longings. He is the only Light for this dark world, the only Life, the very Word of God....'

YET still you do not know Him?...

v. 27 – Here’s the picture: + In that culture, masters expected their disciples/followers to do many things for them: provide food, clothing, and other assistance. – But here is where they drew the line:

Even a disciple/follower could not untie his master’s sandal. – That was too menial, too lowly and insulting for even a disciple. –

ONLY a slave was allowed to untie the master’s sandals....

Reread: v. 27... I.e., ‘Christ is so great, so superior, so beyond me, that I don’t even deserve to do for Him the most degrading task of a slave. I’m below even that.’

‘In the light of Christ’s glory and my sin, I don’t deserve the lick the dust He walks on. I don’t deserve to be mentioned in the same breath. I am unfit even to be near Him, or touch His feet.’

‘That’s how great Christ is, and how insignificant I am in comparison.’ (And this was John the Baptist speaking, the one that Jesus called “the greatest man born of a woman”; what then for the rest of us?!)

→What a portrait of true humility this is! – Ask yourself, *How tall am I when I stand next to Christ?*...

Let’s admit: Sometimes we think, ‘Boy, the Lord *is* pretty lucky to have me on His team. I mean, without me around, He’d be at a loss. He might struggle a bit. I bet He’s glad I signed up....’

Reread: vv. 26b-27...

How tall am I when I stand next to Christ? – Answer: I am not “worthy” – I’m a worm, a wretch, less than grass, shorter than an ant *in comparison* to our glorious, almighty Saviour!

→What an HONOUR then to serve Christ wherever I’m needed! – “Better to be a slave of Christ than to rule vast empires!” (Spurgeon) ‘He who serves Christ would not stoop to serve kings.’ (Watson) – Ps. 84:10...

If am unworthy of the least tasks, then I count any task in the Church the highest of privileges. – Am I needed in the crèche? On tea duty or clean-up? In a struggling small group? To disciple a difficult person? To adopt an orphan? To evangelise in a hard place, go as a missionary to hard people?...

Repeat: v. 27...

+ Last year you met one of my lifelong mentors, Pastor Ron from Texas. – He’s just retired, handing over the pulpit after pasturing Katy Bible Church for 36 yrs! – You know what he does now at the church? –

Mows their lawn! – He insisted that they let him use his riding mower to cut the grass! – He counts it a great privilege to serve Christ & His Church in this way. – What an example of humility. – Imagine as the community drives by, ‘Hey, wasn’t that guy the pastor there for ages? What’s he doing now cutting the grass?!’

Repeat: v. 27...

v. 28 – NB John was truly a Baptist. – He needed a River for baptisms, not a jar or a pitcher. – It was by immersion, not pouring or sprinkling.

Day One, 'Christ is Here!'...

+ Kent Hughes tell a story of the great conductor Arturo Toscanini:

One evening he conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. It was a brilliant performance, at the end of which the audience went absolutely wild! They clapped, whistled, and stamped their feet, absolutely caught up in the greatness of that performance. As Toscanini stood there, he bowed and bowed and bowed, then acknowledged his orchestra.

When the ovation finally began to subside, Toscanini turned and looked intently at his musicians. He was almost out of control as he whispered, "Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" The orchestra leaned forward to listen.

In a fiercely enunciated whisper Toscanini said, "Gentlemen, I am nothing." That was an extraordinary admission since Toscanini was [known for his] enormous ego.

He added, "Gentlemen, you are nothing." They had heard that same message before the rehearsal. "But Beethoven," said Toscanini in a tone of adoration, "is everything, everything, everything!"

This is the attitude we need toward ourselves and toward the Lord Jesus Christ. I am nothing, you are nothing, but HE is everything! That was John's attitude, and it is the attitude of every authentic messenger of Christ.

2. vv. 29-34, DAY TWO: 'Look to Christ!' (spoken to the crowd)

John gives here *THREE ROLES* & names of Christ for us & for the world:

a. v. 29, Christ the Lamb of God

v. 29 – Jesus was returning victorious from his 40 days of fasting & fierce temptation from Satan in the wilderness. – When John sees Christ, he reacts as a true witness. – Mr. "Voice" does his job: v. 29...

Appears to be a favourite sermon of John the Baptist, b/c we'll see it again next week: vv. 35-36...

YET this is not what the Jews expect to hear. – If this was the Messiah, they wanted to hear, 'Behold – God's King, God's Ruler, God's Deliverer, who will break the Roman yoke and liberate you at last!' – Not, "Behold God's Lamb".

A lamb was an impotent, weak, helpless, dumb, and dirty animal. – They didn't want a lamb! – They wanted a lord, a ruler, a champion!

'Messiah should sit on the throne, not lay on the altar. Messiah should draw blood, not shed blood. Messiah should kill our enemies, not be killed by them.'

YET John declares: v. 29b, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

→ See, the Jews were just like most people today: They thought their greatest problems were political, earthly, and external. – They were blind to their biggest need, which was *spiritual*. –

See, once you see yourself in light of God's holiness and His perfect Law – once you see your sin & guilt, then you cry out for a Lamb. – My sin must be atoned for and forgiven, I cannot pay for it myself!

v. 29b, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Here is the gospel in one sentence. – This verse should be broadcast worldwide. – It deserves to put on a banner 500 metres long and pulled across the sky behind a jumbo jet! – Repeat: v. 29b, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

+ Spurgeon was once the visiting preacher in a large hall. – Before the meeting began, he went in early to acquaint himself with the venue and to test his voice. – He announced, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" –

But Spurgeon had no idea that a cleaner was way in the back, sweeping the floors. – The man heard this message, stopped what he was doing, fell to his knees in repentance, and was saved! –

O that such would happen again today. – O the power of this one verse!...

Is this not the whole theme of Scripture? – Could you not write this as a title across the cover of your Bible: "The Story of The Lamb"?

The OT is the 'Anticipation of the Lamb', the NT is the 'Arrival of the Lamb'.

From **Genesis**, we hear that heart-wrenching cry of Isaac on the way up the mountain. – Gen. 22, God had told Abraham to offer up Isaac on the altar. – But the boy asked, 'Dad, the fire, the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' – Abraham replied, 'Son, God will provide for Himself the lamb.'

John 1:29 is at last God's final answer to Isaac's question: 'Where will the lamb come from?' – v. 29b, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

In **Exodus 12**, Passover is instituted. – Each family must select a lamb, 1 yr old, spotless. – They would keep it for 2 wks, as a kind of pet. – Then on the eve of the Passover, the father would take that little lamb and slit its throat, drain out all the blood, until it died....

Then that blood had to be applied to their doorposts. – Otherwise, the angel of death would not Passover their home, but would kill their firstborn child, as the Egyptians all learned by bitter experience.

In **Leviticus**, daily sacrifices are required. – Two lambs a day were sacrificed at temple altars, plus all the other lambs for personal sacrifices. – Jewish priests were virtual butchers. – They lived knee-deep in blood most. – A stream of blood runs through all the OT. – Lev. 17:11, "the life is in the blood".

Sin brings death. – Either you die, or a lamb dies in your place. Heb. 9:22, "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins". – No blood sacrifice, no forgiveness, no life, no peace with God.

In **Isaiah 53**, for the first time the Jews learned that the lamb would be a Man:

Surely our griefs, He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried [“took away”]....He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities...

We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a LAMB that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.

700 years later, after Isaiah’s prophesy, there by the Jordan river, stood the One who was about to fulfil that prophesy: v. 29b, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

BUT WHO were the lambs sacrificed for in the OT? – The daily sacrifices in the tabernacle/temple were for individuals. – The Passover lamb was sacrificed one per family. — The scapegoat on the Day of Atonement was for the Jewish nation. –

Isaiah’s suffering Servant appeared to be a guilt offering also for the Jewish nation: “our transgressions, our iniquities”. – But *not for the world*, not for filthy Gentiles and outsiders, never!

YET John the Baptist proclaims (to Jews!): v. 29b, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

→Do you understand? – It doesn’t matter WHO you are or where you’ve come from – this Lamb is for YOU: Religious or pagan, rich or poor, men & women, boys & girls, young & old.

Christ is able to save ANY, He is offered to ALL.

→If the Spirit of God has convinced you of your sin & guilt, if you realise your desperate need, here is all that is required: “Behold!” – Look to Christ & keep looking. – Gaze at Him with the eyes of your soul. –

+ Look to Christ as earnestly as a drowning child would reach for his father’s hand to rescue him. – Look to Christ as fervently as a groom watches down the aisle for his bride’s arrival. –

Look to Christ as desperately as Zaccheus climbing that tree just to get one glimpse of the Saviour!

Look to Christ as desperately as the snake-bitten Israelites looked at the bronze serpent for healing. – *There is life in one look!* One look of true repentance from sin & true faith in Christ alone, that look will save you! –

→Look to Christ as urgently as if your whole life & eternity depended on it, because it does! – Your everlasting destiny hinges on whether you truly behold the Lamb or not. –

Hell is populated by those who refused to look – who looked to self or to a thousand other places for salvation, but never truly looked to Christ alone.

~ An old saint once said, 'I was saved by my good looks. I took one good look at my sinful self, and then 10 good looks at Christ!'

→ Christians, some of you are still riddled with guilt. – Over failed marriages, failed parenting, failed jobs, failed finance, failed relationships, etc. – You're still carrying around that condemnation.

Do you realise what an *insult* that is to Christ? - v. 29b, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

You must KEEP looking, keep believing – that Christ truly has taken away ALL your sin on Himself. –

Sure, there are consequences. – But there is "NO condemnation" for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1)! – Christ has taken away ALL (not some, or most) of your sin. – 'As far as the east is from the west' (Ps. 103), buried in the depths of the sea!...

~ Isaac Watts:

*Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain.*

*But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.*

*Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And sing His bleeding love.*

b. vv. 30-33, Christ the Baptiser in the Spirit

v. 30 – This is already the 2nd time we hear this from John – cf. v. 15...

John wants to be crystal clear: 'It's kind of hard for anyone else to outrank Someone uncreated, without a beginning. Jesus may be my younger cousin, and his ministry might've begun after me, but doesn't matter: *He ranks above me because He existed before me.*

Everyone & everything else takes a back seat.'

vv. 31a, 33a – John the Baptist knew WHAT he was sent to do, as forerunner to Messiah. But WHO that Messiah was – John didn't realise that at first.

v. 31b – The point of John's baptisms were not just for people to show their repentance. – No, it was also a stage being set for the main actor, the Star of the show who was about to appear.

vv. 32-33 – Here we get a behind-the-scenes look at an event which all 3 other Gospels describe: John's baptism of Jesus, when the Spirit descended on Christ like a dove, and

God Himself thundered out of Heaven saying, 'This is my Beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased.' – An incredibly significant moment!

But what the other Gospels don't mention is this further message that God had given to John the Baptist to prepare him in advance: v. 33b...

NB x2, God's Spirit "remained/remaining upon Him" (vv. 32c, 33c) –

UNLIKE all the other anointed ones in the OT: judges, kings, prophets, upon whom the Spirit only came temporarily and then left. Not like evil King Saul, who had God's Spirit taken from him. –

No, this time it would be different. – Here was THE perfect prophet, priest & King. – God would 'give Him the Spirit without measure' (Jn. 3:34). –

v. 33d – John the Baptist pointed to the greater Baptiser. – Christ would not baptise in mere water; He was doing something far greater and more permanent: v. 33d...

Just as Ezekiel had prophesied centuries earlier – Ezek. 36:25ff: *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*

With the coming of Messiah, a whole new age was dawning!

→This was WHY Jesus came: So that people then & now could encounter God's Holy Spirit, be "baptised" and immersed in & soaked with God's presence. –

So that you could enter into a relationship with the living God by His Spirit! – So that you will discover God's abundant supply of His Spirit. – So that you will discover all the spiritual resources offered to you in Christ.

c. v. 34, Christ the Son of God

v. 34 – NB, perfect tense in the original, i.e., 'I personally saw and can still see in my mind's eye. I testified and continue testifying of Him....' –

I.e., 'Folks, this is not some second-hand gossip or hearsay I'm passing on. I was an eyewitness. I am staking my claim and banking my eternity on this message and this Man.'

Son of God – Fulfillment of Ps. 2:7, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." – NB, in some of the early mss, it reads "Chosen/Elect One" instead.

In either case, it is reminiscent of that first voice heard at Jesus' baptism: "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased." –

John's witness is an echo of that first heavenly declaration, an echo that never fades.

→Our witness today is but the ongoing echo of John's witness that Jesus is "THE Son of God".

I.e., that Jesus is God the Son, 2nd Person of the Trinity, the eternal Word made flesh, the God-man. – Recall vv. 14c, 18b (“only begotten from the Father”)...

Do you realise that if Jesus is anything less than the very Son of God, John’s Gospel is *blasphemous*. – Only a blasphemer, or a lunatic, could ever claim what John claims about this Jesus of Nazareth. – Just take chp. 1 so far!:

The eternal Word, the Light, the Life, only-begotten God from the bosom of the Father, the Christ, Lamb of God....

HOW DARE John speak this way of a mere man, if indeed He is but a man? – Unthinkable, unless it were true: v. 34...

CONCL. – Two great two days, two great truths...

+ Spurgeon tells of the great missionary, Adoniram Judson, returning home to America after many decades in Burma (Myanmar today):

There was a large congregation gathered together and they requested the returned missionary, the veteran of so many years of service, to address the assembly. He stood up and simply told...the story of Christ suffering in the place of sinners and of Christ saving all who trust Him.

Then he sat down. Someone who sat next to him said to him, “I am afraid the friends are rather disappointed—they expected to hear something interesting from you.”

Judson replied, “I have spoken to them to the best of my ability upon the most interesting subject in the whole world! What could I have done better than that?”

“Yes,” said the other, “but after having been so long abroad, they thought that you would tell them some interesting story. They did not think you would come all the way from Burma just to tell them only that.”

Judson then rose and said, “I should like to go home feeling that although I have come all the way from Burma, I do not know anything that I can tell you that I think is half as good for you to hear, or half as interesting, as the story of the love of Christ in dying to save sinners.”

PRAY

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. How will John the Baptist’s example impact your witness for Christ? (esp. John’s humility, selflessness, boldness, Christ-centredness, etc.)
2. How can we overcome self-love and self-focus?
3. How can you specifically prepare your heart for the Lord’s coming? What should the ‘roadworks of repentance’ look like in your life?
4. How does the OT background help you appreciate Jesus as our “Lamb of God”? What does it mean to you that He has taken away *your* sin? Why do others still refuse to accept such free grace?
5. How is it that John’s Gospel is blasphemous and criminal if Jesus is not truly the Son of God, God come in the flesh?

6. Why did Jesus have to be baptised? What does that mean for us today?