

## THIS IS GOD'S CHOSEN ONE

John 1:19-34

Key Verse: 1:34, "I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

John chapter 1 contains testimonies to who Jesus is from 3 persons or person groups: from the author, apostle John; from John the Baptist; and from Jesus' first disciples. Last week we heard from the author who Jesus is: Jesus is the eternal Word who became human, the true light, and the one who reveals the unseen God to us. In this next part, John the Baptist testifies to who Jesus is and what he came to do in 3 declarations: Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit; and, Jesus is God's Chosen One, the Son of God. Through God's word in this passage, may we learn sincerely the attitude of John the Baptist as a humble servant of Christ. More than that, may we all personally accept his testimony of who Jesus is.

### I. The Attitude of John the Baptist toward Jesus (19-28)

Thus far the author, apostle John, has given us a profound introduction to who Jesus is. Now he launches into his gospel narrative, telling the story of Jesus, beginning with John the Baptist. When we say John the Baptist we're not talking about his denomination, saying John was a Baptist rather than a Methodist or a Lutheran or a Presbyterian. There were no such divisions of Christianity in those days. In fact there were no Christians yet. So John the Baptist or Baptizer simply refers to his ministry of baptizing people in the river. Look at verses 19-21.

<sup>19</sup> Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. <sup>20</sup> He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

<sup>21</sup> They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."

Verse 19 introduces the testimony of John the Baptist. Who was John the Baptist? Chapter 1 verses 6-8 and verse 15 already told us that John was a witness to the true light. He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. Of course, the true light is Jesus Christ. We know from Luke chapter 1 that John the Baptizer was the miracle baby of elderly, godly parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth. Many people believed that John was a true prophet from God, who spoke God's message to the people. John was bold, fearless and uncompromising. He didn't care what people said or thought about him. He wasn't trying to please people. John told people to turn from their sins, that is, their self-centered way of living, and rather to honor and follow God and the ways of God. He told people to "repent," that is, to change their minds from serving their own worldly thoughts and desires to serving God. He also said, "the kingdom of God is near." His message moved people to respond. Some responded positively: they knew they needed a godly change in their lives, so they confessed their sins and were baptized by John in the Jordan River as a sincere expression that they wanted to start a new, changed life. John baptized them as a sign of cleansing and new start. Others

came to John out of curiosity, like those who go to see some spectacle or like those who want to be entertained. Still others really didn't like John and his ministry since it posed a threat to their own position and lifestyle. Those who were persuaded that they were good people or simply that they didn't intend to change their lives in any way became resistant to John's message and ministry. These people came to investigate and scrutinize what John was doing. Rumors were that John might possibly be the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, who would be the greatest king ever.

Who were the Jewish people expecting? The word "Messiah" is from a Hebrew word meaning "Anointed One." From the Greek language, the word is "Christ." In Jewish history there were 3 anointed offices: prophet, priest and king. The Messiah would be all three of these in one person: an anointed Prophet, Priest and King. As the anointed Prophet, he would speak God's message. As the anointed Priest, he would mediate in an ultimate way, prayers and sacrifices to bring people to God. As the anointed King, he would rule with true justice and peace forever. People were wondering if John was this Anointed Messiah.

But he told them clearly: "I am not the Messiah." They asked him, "Are you Elijah?" Why did they ask this? Elijah was a great prophet who lived about 850 years before Christ. He was a fiery prophet who rebuked the king of Israel for worshiping idols. Elijah challenged false prophets to a contest of fire so he could show that the God of Israel is the true and living God. When the time came for the prophet Elijah to die, he was swept up to heaven in a chariot of fire. So Elijah did not die, but was taken up to heaven. The Jews thought that he might come back some day. To this day, when Jews celebrate the Passover, they leave a space for Elijah, thinking, "Who knows, he might come back?" Malachi also prophesied some mysterious words, written hundreds of years after Elijah's time: "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes" (Mal 4:5). The Jews wondered if John the Baptist might be this return of Elijah in the body. But John said to them, "I am not." It meant simply, "I am not the reincarnation or return of the prophet Elijah."

They also asked John, "Are you the Prophet?" This is a reference to words that Moses spoke to Israel in Deuteronomy 18:15, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him." John was not that prophet. The book of Acts tells us that the prophet whom Moses spoke of was in fact the Messiah, Jesus (Ac 3:22; 7:37).

So what did John say about himself? The investigators wanted an answer to take back to those who sent them. John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" John quoted this from the prophet Isaiah chapter 40 verse 3. Bible scholars note that a shift in the text of Isaiah occurs in chapter 40, where it becomes notably hopeful and messianic. That is, it begins to speak of the hope of national restoration through the coming of the Messiah. Listen to the first 5 verses of Isaiah chapter 40:

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a

highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.' And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Especially John the Baptist quoted the words, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” John found his mission and purpose of life in God’s word. Of course, he must’ve known the message that his parents received from God’s angel about his life mission. Luke 1:15-17 records the angel’s words to his father Zechariah regarding his miracle baby John: “...for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

So John’s mission from God was to be a voice or herald or messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

But the investigators didn’t like John’s answer. So they pressed him further, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” John’s baptizing had some power and authority to it. He was influencing people in a new and powerful way to turn to God, and his critics didn’t like it. Usually when we are criticized, our natural response is to either become defensive and explain what we are doing, or to criticize back in an offensive attack. But John did not defend himself nor did he attack his critics. Rather, John replied, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” John deflected attention away from himself to speak of the one coming after him. He said that he was not even worthy to be a servant of this coming one.

Here we learn from John the right attitude of a Christian. It is to point to the greatness of Jesus Christ. It is to delight in talking to others or steering a conversation to Jesus Christ. To be a Christian means to be “one who belongs to Jesus Christ” or “one who is in Jesus Christ.” Does it show in our lives that we belong to Jesus, that we are in him? Does it come out naturally in our conversation? Not in an offensive or obnoxious way, but in a winsome, inviting way? It’s quite natural for anyone to talk mostly about him or herself: I, my, me. It is more noble and self-effacing to talk about others or to let others talk about themselves. But that also is ultimately empty. Don’t get me wrong. It’s polite to listen to others when they talk about themselves. But if that’s mainly what they do, we do them no service to let them keep doing so. Likewise, if we find ourselves talking too much about ourselves, the Holy Spirit will remind us, if we belong to Jesus, to turn the attention to Jesus and eternal things of God. May God help us to do so. Amen?

## II. The Testimony of John the Baptist toward Jesus (29-34)

So John was keeping his listeners in suspense. They began to wonder, “Who is this coming great one, even greater than you?” In this part, John actually declares three things about this great one, the Messiah, Jesus.

First, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Please look at verses 29-31.

<sup>29</sup> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup> This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

The gospel writer John has already introduced the Messiah Jesus as the eternal Word with the Father. So this could very well be what John the Baptist meant when he said that though Jesus came after him he was “before him.” “Before” can mean in time, that Jesus is the eternal God. It can also mean in rank, that Jesus came before him in greatness. Both are certainly true.

What John the Baptist introduces to us in verse 29 is the incredible declaration that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” How can a lamb take away sin, and how did Jesus do this? The reference to a lamb that can take away sin could have several meanings according to Jewish thought. It could be a reference to the daily sacrifice of lambs to take away the sins of the people. It could be an allegorical connection to the lamb that was sacrificed in place of Isaac on Mount Moriah when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering. The most meaningful connection is to the Passover lamb.

The Passover was perhaps the greatest annual celebration in Jewish life, and still is. The Passover celebrates their deliverance from death and their freedom from slavery. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. God sent Moses to lead them out to freedom. God punished the king of Egypt, along with his people, with ten devastating plagues on their nation. The tenth plague was the worst, for it directly affected human life. It was the plague on the firstborn sons. The firstborn sons in every household all died throughout Egypt. But the Israelites were given a way to save their firstborn sons: they slaughtered a lamb and put the lamb’s blood on the doorframes of their homes. By the blood of the Passover lamb, their firstborn were saved from death.

Jesus Christ died during a Passover season. He was nailed to the cross, shedding his blood. The blood of Jesus saves not just firstborn children but all people who trust in him. There are dozens of direct references and hundreds of allusions to the blood of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Here are three.

1 Peter 1:18-19, “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

Romans 3:25a says, “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith.”

Again, Hebrews 9:14 says, “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”

Let me share one more. 1 John 2:2 says, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Yes, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! How did John the Baptist know this? Of course, God revealed it to him. But he could’ve and probably did find it in the Scriptures. In fact, Isaiah 53:7 prophesied saying, “...he was led like a lamb to the slaughter.” In that most amazing 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah which foretold the meaning of the Messiah’s death perhaps better than any other Old Testament passage, Isaiah saw in verse 5: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Bible makes it very clear that sin is the real problem of all mankind. We can pretend it doesn’t exist. But that doesn’t make it go away. We can try to do good, like Dr. Jekyll, to take our sins away. But that doesn’t eliminate Mr. Hyde and his sins, that is, the evil in each one of us. Education, therapy, and medication can’t take our sins away. Incarceration, restitution, community service can’t remove our sins. Meditation, giving to the needy, championing a worthy cause—none of these can remove sin from the human soul. But look! The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. Acts 10:43 declares, “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Only Jesus can cleanse our consciences and take away our guilty feelings. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Second, Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (32-33). Look at verses 32-33.

<sup>32</sup> Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. <sup>33</sup> And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’”

John the Baptist did not know who the Messiah was. But he got a divine message which told him the sign by which he could identify the Messiah. The sign to identify the Messiah would be that the Holy Spirit would descend and remain upon him. That man would be the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. That man is Jesus Christ.

Every person needs the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is given to all who receive Jesus Christ and believe in his name. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the seal and gift given to the children of God (Eph 1:13; Ac 2:38). The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children, and by him we cry, “Abba, Father” (Ro 8:15-16). The Holy Spirit fills us with satisfaction more than alcohol or drugs can. That’s why Ephesians 5:18 says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...”

This week one of my aunts died. She was three years older than my mother. I searched for any of her children on Facebook, since they are my cousins. I found one of them. This is what she posted on Facebook:

I lost the BEST mom ever today. Taken away too soon, too suddenly! She called me last night & told me how proud she was of me & the kids, she told me she loved me. Never did I think that was the last time I would ever get to talk to her. Mom, thanks for everything, but mostly thanks for teaching me to have faith & for trusting in Jesus. You said many times you were ready to go, but we would reassure you we weren't ready for you to leave us. I love & miss you mom! ♥ □

The words "trusting in Jesus" caught my attention. So I connected with my cousin and found out that after her failed marriage she read the Bible and found a new life in Jesus. She was the second cousin to my knowledge to express a personal encounter with Jesus through God's word in the Bible. She testified that her three children have also been saved by Jesus. I searched a bit more and found another cousin who also attends a Bible church, as well as his sister. I am aware of 6 of us out of 78 cousins who testify to a new life in Jesus Christ. (I have a lot of cousins because my maternal grandparents had 13 children.) It's so thrilling when I hear that others have found Jesus Christ and are living for him. There is no greater blessing than to be able to testify by his Holy Spirit: "I'm a child of God, by his grace. Praise the Lord!"

Third, Jesus is God's Chosen One, the Son of God (34). In verse 34 John concludes his testimony of Jesus for the time being. He says, "I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One." The footnote tells us that many ancient Greek manuscripts have the words "this is the Son of God" in place of, "this is God's Chosen One." But no worries, since they both refer to the same person, the Messiah, and they both reveal true aspects of Jesus Christ. The new NIV translators note a close connection in this passage with Isaiah 42:1, which says, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations." God's chosen one, the Messiah, is anointed in the fullness of God's Spirit. This is God's Chosen One, Jesus Christ.

Today we learned about the attitude of John the Baptist toward Jesus Christ, which should be our attitude as Christians: to advertise and point to Jesus Christ. We also heard the testimony of John the Baptist about Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Chosen One, the Son of God. May we all receive from Jesus with assurance the forgiveness of sin and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. May we pray.