

July 13, 2008

“The Witness of John the Baptist” John 1:19-34

FCF: Confusion as to who Jesus is.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Given the introduction by John the Baptist,
(magnet) we must see Jesus as greater (bigger and better) than our expectations.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Introductions are funny. Sometimes they open doors. Sometimes they close them. Case in point, when someone introduces me by saying, “*This is my pastor.*” The upside of that is it cuts to the chase and makes clear my calling. The downside is it may set me up. If this person has a lofty image in their mind of a pastor, well, then I may well not measure up. If they have a lesser image, well, then they’ve just put up their guard.

Introductions – they communicate a lot. We’re looking at the introduction to John’s Gospel this morning. Thus far, we’ve done a survey and considered the prologue. Now we come to the introduction. Who is Jesus? Who is He? We need to know the answer to that question. He may not be what you’ve heard. He may be a whole lot more.

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 1:19-34](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

John’s prologue in vv.1-18 is unique among the Gospels. It starts with a cosmic panoramic perspective, orienting us to everything that is to come. John’s introduction here in vv.19-34 then segues from a brief mention of John the Baptist in the prologue into his actual testimony. What is the writer, the Apostle John, doing here? Certainly part of his purpose is to introduce us to John the Baptist. But surely his greater purpose is to introduce us to Jesus. It’s as if he’s saying, “*Look, before we go any further, I want you to be sure of who Jesus is. I want you to know something more of Him.*”

The prologue, vv.1-18, which we looked at last week, makes clear Jesus’ divine nature. But what is equally clear in the introduction, vv.19-34, is His redemptive mission – who He is and why He came. John the Baptist was preparing, introducing his hearers to this One to come. And John the Apostle, in relaying these events to us, is introducing his readers to this One to come as well. And what we see through the testimonies of both is that, despite whatever else we may have heard or assumed, we must begin to see Jesus as greater than our expectations, all with mind stretching and life changing implications.

I. JOHN’S RELATION TO JESUS

This begins in vv.19-28 and what we learn of John the Baptist’s relation to Jesus.

A) The Dialogue with the Religious Leaders

There are two dialogues here, the first being with the religious leaders.

1. The range of the questions

(**READ John 1:19**) Understand the historical context. For over 400 years, God had been silent. So given the longing of the people for God to act, to deliver them (especially from the Romans), John’s arrival on the scene caused a stir. Was he a sign? The leaders had to check him out. And so they sent a deputation from Jerusalem out into the wilderness.

2. The scope of the answers

John was clear as to who he wasn’t (**READ John 1:20-21**). He was clear as to who he wasn’t – neither the Christ nor these figures tied to the Christ. He was also clear as to who he was (**READ John 1:22-23**). He quotes Isaiah 40:3 – an announcement of good news, anticipating a redemption through a Suffering Servant and the coming of a new heaven and a new earth. And John is “the voice,” the one heralding the Coming One.

B) *The Dialogue with the Pharisees*

After this then comes another dialogue with a subgroup (READ John 1:24).

1. Their concern

The Pharisees were a Jewish party scrupulous in observing every detail of God's law as they saw it, with an oral tradition on how that law was to be obeyed. Their concern – what authorized John's baptisms – especially of Jewish people? (READ John 1:25)

2. John's answer

John gave them not so much the answer they wanted but the answer they needed (READ John 1:26-27). Yes, he was baptizing. Yes, it was a bold authoritative act. But whatever stature he had, it was nothing compared to the One still unrecognized in their midst.

"He is the One you're looking for." This was John the Baptist's message to them.

Application:

And, as this Gospel opens, it is John the Apostle's message to us. *"He is the One you're looking for."* That yearning for more, that insatiable hunger and longing of your heart, He alone can meet. Some of you can well identify with the Pharisees. You know the commands. You grew up with them. And you've tried to be a good – not to drink, smoke, or chew, or go with those who do. And it's wearing you out as you waffle between pretending you're holding your own and yet despairing in knowing you're not.

Others of us identify with the crowds listening in to all this. You know these commands too. You've known them enough to know how thoroughly you've spurned them. You've run and ruined things just fine on your own. And the tighter you try to hold it together, the more it seems to unravel. Your pursuits are coming up empty, you're enslaved to your desires, isolated from your friends. And it's wearing you out as well.

What is John's message? The need to come to this One who came for us. The reality that Jesus is greater than our expectations. He is the One you're looking for.

II. JOHN'S TESTIMONY TO JESUS

We see that in John's clearly stated relation to Jesus. That's the first point. But then we see it all the more in the second point, in John's testimony to Jesus as well.

A) *The Lamb of God*

Listen to this stunning proclamation the very next day (READ John 1:29).

1. John the Baptist's understanding

Now, we need to be clear here. Given what we read of him later, when John the Baptist referred to Jesus here as the "Lamb of God," he likely had ideas of an apocalyptic lamb, a warrior "who takes away the sin of the world" in the sense of judgment and destruction. Not so much a lamb that has come to clean hearts but, even more, to clean house.

2. John the Apostle's understanding

That said, the author, John the Apostle, had a better vantage point. Which is an emphasis we see throughout his gospel – a growing understanding on the part of Jesus' followers. Which is to say, John the Baptist spoke here better than he knew. John the Apostle could see Jesus from another vantage point – the fulfillment of the prophecies. Think Isaiah 53.

B) *The Son of God*

Jesus is the Lamb of God. And the Son of God as well (READ John 1:30-34).

1. His relation to the Father

There are two parts here. Most obviously, this speaks to the fundamental reality of Jesus' relationship to the Father. There is an eternal, everlasting love bond between the Father

and the Son. Which is to say, in terms of His coming, His incarnation, we have to think in terms not only of the Son giving Himself for us but the Father giving up His Son.

2. His anointing by the Spirit

Jesus as the Son of God has to do fundamentally with His relation to the Father. But there is also this aspect of His relation to and anointing by the Spirit. John proclaims he saw the Spirit not only descend but remain upon Jesus. The Spirit remained upon Him. Unlike any before, the commissioning, the empowering, is permanent. A new age has come. God's people not only have their sins forgiven but their hearts renewed as well.

This is who has come. He is both the Lamb of God and the Son of God.

Application:

And the message of both the Baptist and the Apostle is *“This Jesus, the One you're looking for, gives more than you dare ask for.”* The love of a son – an adoptive love, a place in the family (READ John 1:12-13). Because of the work of the Son of God we can be made sons of God – security, standing, someone to turn to, a place to belong.

In Him there is the love of a son. And the power of the Spirit as well. His having been anointed by the Spirit authorizes, sets Him apart, to empower us with the Spirit. Which leads me to one simple point that has to be made here. If Jesus, the Son of God, needed the presence of the Spirit of God in His life to carry out the task set before Him, how much more ourselves? He is the One we're looking for. And the One we need.

CONCLUSION:

And this is what made the ministry of John the Baptist so shocking. *“What do you mean by baptizing people, saying we need a deeper cleansing? What do you mean telling us of this Lamb of God, saying we need someone to die in our place?”*

The people had lost sight of the scapegoat, the great exchange pictured in the Temple worship. “The Day of Atonement” – the day once a year when the system of sacrifices inaugurated by God for the Jewish people reached its climax. On that day, two male goats were selected and the high priest cast lots over them. One was to be killed, its blood sprinkled on and before the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. The other was prayed over and released into the wilderness. What did it all mean? The one that was slaughtered was meant to signify the heinousness of sin, how offensive it is to God, that it has to be dealt with, and what it deserves. The other had hands laid upon its head, the sins of the people confessed over it, symbolically transferring those sins to the goat, which then carried them away into the wilderness never to be seen again. Now put together, the message was that with the death of another on your behalf, your guilt would be borne away. And through the finished work of Christ, that imagery has been fulfilled.

John's ministry – both his call to baptism and repentance – was a reminder of these things, these things the people had forgotten. And things we are prone to forget as well. Be honest. Do you believe what John is saying here? Do you believe things are that bad? And if you're not a Christian, they still are. The slaughtered goat, the gore of the crucifixion it pointed towards – that's how seriously God takes both us and our sin. Do you believe that? But then, on the flip side, do you believe things are that good? That God could really love you that much in Christ? Look out over the camp. The scapegoat is gone. He has borne your sin away! Do you believe that? Can you grasp it?

Such is what John the Baptist and through him John the Apostle want us to see, believe, trust, and lay hold of – the subject of this Book, the hope of us all, Jesus.

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