

020: Behold the Lamb!

(based on Sermon #013 in the Life of Christ Series)

Throughout the centuries of church history, the Holy Spirit has empowered certain preachers to stir the hearts of God's people to revival, which is simply a return to spiritual life.

- Think of Peter on the day of Pentecost, and in more modern times, men such as Whitefield, Wesley, and Moody.
- But often forgotten in the list of great revival preachers is John the Baptist.
- The Gospels present John as a fiery, exclamatory, revival preacher.
- We already explored his primary message in a previous study:
- “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”
- Notice the exclamation point at the end of the sentence in our English translation.
- Perhaps his message could be summed up: “Turn away from your sins and return to fellowship with Jehovah, for He is coming to make you an offer regarding the kingdom!”
- In this study we will see another exclamatory aspect of John's message.
- I will read the text – it is John 1:19-29

John 1:19-29

- 19 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”
- 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

- 21 And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”
- 22 Then they said to him, “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”
- 23 He said: “I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the LORD,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”
- 24 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees.
- 25 And they asked him, saying, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”
- 26 John answered them, saying, “I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.
- 27 It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”
- 28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.
- 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

What an exclamation!

- In fact, in that last verse, there are *two* exclamation points in this statement in our English translation, because it is said with great emotion and depth of meaning.
- “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
- Not only does John say this in v. 29, he says it again in abbreviated form in v. 36.
- By this point in John's ministry, he has garnered quite a following.

- His message is spreading like wildfire.
- Mark gives a glowing report:
- Mark 1:5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

As the Israelites are confronted with their sinfulness through the preaching of this Spirit-empowered revivalist, many come under conviction.

- Just as there had been a revival in the days of Elijah on Mt. Carmel, so this second Elijah, so to speak, is being used of God to stir up revival in Israel once again.
- Multitudes come to repent and submit to baptism for the remission of sins.
- John's following is growing steadily.
- He has been preaching for several months, and the religious leaders are growing deeply concerned.
- Now, John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah, and that turns up the heat all the more.
- What tools does John use to get across the idea of Jesus as Messiah?

1. A Vivid Metaphor

- What is coming to mind for these first century Jews, upon hearing John the Baptist use the metaphor "Lamb of God?"
- Very likely, they have at least five thoughts.
- **a. The Lamb typified in Abel's sacrifice.**
- Gen. 4:2-5
- 2 Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.
- 3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

- 4-5 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.
- What was the problem?
- Apparently, God had specified that lambs be sacrificed to the Lord.
- Cain rebelled and chose to bring an offering of his own choosing, rather than God's required blood sacrifice.
- This story goes back to the very beginning of time, and is very clear in the Scriptures.
- It sets a precedent for all sacrifices to follow, and the Jews are surely aware of this.
- Acceptable to God is the blood of a lamb.
- a second thought in the mind of the Israelites is ...

b. The Lamb typified in the offering of Isaac.

- Gen. 22:7-8 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father ... Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering."
- Whether he realizes it or not, Abraham utters a prophetic statement.
- You know what happens in the end of the story.
- After the angel of the Lord stops Abraham from killing Isaac, he discovers a ram in the thicket.
- Gen. 22:13 Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.
- According to Heb. 11:19, had God taken Isaac in death, Abraham knew God would have raised him up, and so this is a type for us — a type of the Lamb of God, who would be killed and rise again.

- What else would have come to mind for these Jews in the first century, hearing John the Baptist use the term, “Behold the Lamb?”

c. The Lamb typified in the Passover.

- Ex. 12:5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year ... Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.
- 7 And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.
- 13 Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you.
- 1 Cor. 5:7 connects Jesus with this event, saying, “Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us.”

d. The Lamb typified in the silent sheep of Isa. 53.

- Isa. 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.

e. The Lamb typified in the sacrificial system.

- Three of the five offerings in the Old Testament Levitical system of sacrifices were for the purpose of atoning for sins and, consequently, required the substitutionary sacrificing of an animal on man’s behalf, oftentimes a lamb.
- It is very important for New Testament believers to understand that the entire Levitical system was designed for individual Israelites (and the entire nation, on the Day of Atonement) to confess their sins, receive forgiveness and cleansing from God, and be restored to fellowship with Him.

• The offerings did not pertain to matters of salvation!

- The nation was already presumed “saved,” on the basis of the blood applied on the doorposts in Egypt at the time of the Exodus.
- The nation subsequently remembered the national salvation every year at the annual Passover celebration.
- But the ongoing daily sacrificial system was more like a New Testament saint claiming 1 John 1:9.
- 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- In every case, the death of lambs in the Old Testament pictured the coming Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. John’s use of this metaphor is masterful.

However, there is one big problem in the minds of the Israelites.

- Upon hearing John describe Jesus as the Lamb of God, their thoughts are surely flooded with pictures of lambs being slain, for that pervades their entire culture, but how does that apply to Jesus, who is being presented at the nation’s Messiah?
- They cannot fathom a dying Messiah.
- That concept does not fit the national psyche and is the furthest thing from their minds.
- The prophets speak of Messiah as king over the nations of Earth, with Israel functioning as the premier nation.
- They cannot imagine Messiah as the Lamb of God.
- The metaphor is all wrong.
- We know this is how they are thinking, for we have the example of Christ’s disciples, who are completely sold out to Him, yet do not understand, much less receive, His

teaching about His pending death and resurrection, for a very long time.

In fact, when they are initially confronted with the idea by Jesus Himself, they resist vehemently.

- Matt. 16:21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.
- 22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”
- 23 But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

The prophecies of Ps. 22 and Isa. 53 may be clear to *you*, as a New Testament believer, but keep in mind that you have a historical vantage point.

- You are looking from hindsight, thus you are able to clearly see all the prophecies of Christ’s death and resurrection as having been fulfilled in Him.
- But those prophecies are not at all clear to *them*, the first century Jews, who are limited in their Old Testament perspective.
- In order to understand the message of the Gospels, modern readers must understand the historical context, and that includes the critical component of understanding what the Jews would have been thinking in their cultural context.
- While John the Baptist proclaims a glorious nugget of truth, using a marvelous metaphor — Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world — from our

perspective, we must remember that it is a mere “seed thought” for the first century Jews.

- John is planting an image in their minds that will bear fruit later, but for now, it is quite confusing.
- What tools does John use to get across the idea of Jesus as Messiah?
- He certainly uses the vivid metaphor of a lamb, as seen throughout the Old Testament, conjuring up ideas of substitutionary atonement in the minds of the people. But he also uses a second tool.

2. A Humble Confession

- John 1:20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”
- As mentioned earlier, John’s ministry is spectacular. Hundreds, if not thousands, are responding to his message by repenting and submitting to baptism.
- A tremendous revival is sweeping through Judea.
- Of course, this catches the attention of the religious authorities.
- John 1:19 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”
- The religious authorities, wanting to be sure everything is copacetic, send a religious committee of priests and Levites to investigate.

Pink says this testifies to the “spiritual ignorance of the religious leaders among the Jews.”

- Some commentators believe the Sanhedrin is behind it.
- Notice the term “the Jews” in v. 19.
- John the apostle uses this term seventy-one times in his Gospel.

- In most cases, he uses the term to refer to the religious establishment who are hostile to Jesus.
- So this is a clue that this committee is probably going to be somewhat adversarial toward John the Baptist.
- Note the question of the religious committee at the end of v. 19, “Who are you?”
- In vs. 20ff John answers their questions, and his answers tell us what he thinks of himself, and what he thinks of Messiah.
- This man is humble. He is focused on Christ, not on self.
- Three things stand out regarding John’s responses to the committee:

a. John never gives his name or credentials.

- When the leaders ask, “Who are you?” he never says, “Oh, my name is John. I’m a Levite just like you guys, and I’m also of a priestly line. You may have heard of my parents. My father was Zacharias the priest; my mother Elizabeth also comes from the priestly lineage of Aaron. I am the miracle child God gave them in their old age. Their story is like that of Abraham and Sarah. An angel visited my father and told him that I would be great in the sight of the Lord and that I would become the prophet of the Highest and that many would be pointed to Messiah in my ministry — all of this was prophesied before my birth. The angel also told my father that I would be a prophet having the spirit and power of Elijah. I have lived for a couple of decades in the wilderness, communing with God and training for this ministry. I have been filled with the Holy Spirit, even from my mother’s womb. And, as you can see, I am a Nazirite, like Samson the judge and Samuel the prophet. Oh, yes, did I mention that I am the cousin of the Messiah?”
- That is obviously *not* how the conversation progresses.

- When the men ask, “Who are you?” John knows the nation is looking for a deliverer to free them from the Romans.
- He knows that an unusual person with the power of God upon him is going to be viewed as a Messianic candidate.
- A lesser man would have taken advantage of the situation to make himself look good, but not John.
- He confesses frankly in v. 20, “I am not the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah of Israel.”

So the religious committee asks another question: “Who are you then? Are you Elijah?”

- It was commonly accepted in Israel that Elijah would precede the coming of Messiah because of what Malachi had prophesied.
- Malachi 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.
- These were the last words spoken in the Old Testament.
- They were followed by four hundred years of silence before John burst onto the scene in Israel.
- No wonder they think of him as Elijah. It is a valid question.
- Keep in mind what the angel had announced to Zacharias before the birth of John the Baptist.
- Luke 1:17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Based on this verse, John could have proudly said to the religious leaders: “Yes, I’m Elijah, the angel told my father that I would be.”

- That would be arrogant, and he’s not *actually* Elijah, but he did come in the spirit and power of Elijah.
- John doesn't throw that at them either.
- He humbly replies, “No, I am not Elijah.”
- In v. 21, the leaders ask him, “Are you the prophet?” Undoubtedly, they are referring to the One prophesied by Moses.
- Deut. 18:15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.
- This is a prophecy of Messiah’s coming, describing Him as meek, like Moses.
- But the Jews misunderstood this passage and thought another unnamed prophet would come to precede Messiah.
- John again says, “No, I am not that one.”

Do you see the humble spirit of this man?

- There is much more that he could possibly tell them about his heritage and his credentials and His calling and His ordination by God and His training by the Spirit in the wilderness, but he refrains.
- He is not out to make a name for himself.
- John is humble; he is not self-focused.
- Child of God, are focused on yourself?
- Do you put yourself up and others down?
- Are you quick to criticize others while patting yourself on the back?
- Does that contribute to a life of exalting the Savior?
- Can you effectively tell others about Jesus when you are puffed up and focused on self?

- Those who are proud and puffed up will not unashamedly confess Jesus before men.
- Rather, they will cower in fear, like Peter who denied Jesus at the crucifixion.

Oh, that we would learn from John that self is to be abased; that Christ and others are to be promoted!

- Phil. 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.
- 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
- 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.
- In the spirit of our text (John 1), we could also apply this to John the Baptist.
- “Let this mind be in you which was also in John.”
- This humble man never gives his name or credentials.

b. John turns all the attention on Christ.

- The religious leaders see they are getting nowhere with John.
- So they ask him frankly in v. 22: “Who are you? What can you say for yourself?”
- John answers with a scripture passage from Isaiah that refers prophetically to him.
- Isa. 40:3 (I am) the voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the LORD.”
- This is a Messianic prophecy.
- Thus, John is claiming to be a prophet, preparing the way for Messiah’s coming.
- In those days there were no paved roads, so if a king wanted to travel from one place to another, he would send advance men to prepare the way.

- They would cut a path and smooth out the roads so when the royal chariot would come through at a later time, the way would be straight and smooth for the king.

In a spiritual sense, this is what John is doing for Christ.

- He applies the Isaiah prophecy to himself and essentially says, “I am simply a road builder for the king who is coming!”
- John is also claiming to be merely a *voice* while Jesus is the *Word* (John 1:1).
- Pink says, “The Word exists (in the mind) before the voice articulates it.”
- Furthermore, a voice is heard, but not seen.
- When we get to ch. 3 of John’s Gospel in a future study, we are going to see John’s statement: “He must increase; I must decrease.”
- That was his attitude about Jesus, summed up in one brief statement.
- Jesus must be exalted; John must be abased.

That is the attitude God wants all of us to have.

- In v. 24 God lets us know that these religious leaders sent by the Sanhedrin are of the sect of the Pharisees, not the Sadducees.
- They are the legalists, and that comes out in the next question.
- John 1:25 And they asked him, saying, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”
- As if to say, “If you are not the Messiah, and you are not Elijah, and you are not that prophet predicted in Deuteronomy, then where do you get the authority to baptize?”

- Here’s the rub: The Jews practiced baptism for ritual cleansing, but in all cases the baptismal candidates baptized themselves.

There was no precedent for *John* to be baptizing other people, and the Jews did not regard themselves as needing to repent.

- This was something Gentiles needed to do when they converted to Judaism.
- John baptizes Jews who have repented of sin and desire to return to fellowship with Jehovah.
- Multitudes are repenting of hardened hearts, vice, and corruption.
- They are repenting of hypocrisy and unbelief.
- Mountains of pride and self-will are being leveled.
- Crooked and devious ways are being straightened.
- Ruggedness is being smoothed out by John’s preaching in advance of Messiah’s arrival.

This irritates the Pharisees.

- They wonder, “Why do we Jews need to repent? We’re already God’s chosen people!”
- We’re faithfully worshipping in the temple.
- We don’t need baptism. That’s for Gentile proselytes.”
- Clearly, these religious leaders do not think John has the authority to be baptizing anyone.
- He has not graduated from their rabbinic schools.
- He is not part of the religious establishment.
- He holds no position of honor as a Pharisee or Sadducee.
- So where does he get the audacity to baptize Jews as if they are Gentile proselytes, needing repentance?
- Jews need no repentance! They are children of Abraham!

How does John respond? Instead of talking about His God-given authority, John points to Jesus.

- 26 John answered them, saying, “I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.
- 27 It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”
- Three times in the text John says, “He is preferred before me” (vs. 15, 27, 30).
- That statement is a bit confusing in English.
- It literally means, “He is here before me.”
- But wait a minute!
- John preceded Jesus as His forerunner, not the other way around.
- Vincent says: “*Before* (preferred *before* me) is used of time, not of dignity or rank. The expression is enigmatical in form: ‘my successor is my predecessor.’”

This is a clear statement of the eternality and therefore the deity of Christ.

- The forerunner realizes that he is a mere man, but that Jesus is God incarnate.
- Though Jesus had been born after John, John is very clear that Jesus actually preceded him — and all mankind, for that matter — because He is the eternal, self-existent One.
- In light of Christ’s Deity, John the Baptist says in v. 27, “I am not worthy to unloose the straps of his sandals.”
- He refers to the custom of the day in which the lowest slave of the house would take off the sandals of traveling guests and wash their feet.
- John is emphasizing the position and power and authority of the one whom he precedes, who actually precedes him.

- So here’s the idea: “Men, you are questioning me about baptism?”
- Let me tell you, someone is coming who is far greater than me.”
- This humble preacher turns all the attention on Christ.

c. John hails Spirit baptism over water baptism.

- John, in His humble spirit, views water baptism — which is a key part of his ministry — as much less in importance than the kind of baptism Christ will bring: Spirit baptism.
- 31 “I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.”
- 32 And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.
- 33 I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

Twice John says, “I did not know Him.”

- It seems John actually never met Christ until his baptism.
- Yes, they are cousins, but Christ lived in Nazareth of Galilee and John lived in the wilderness of Judea.
- Perhaps God deliberately kept the two apart until this point in time so that no one could accuse them of collusion.
- In other words, John did not receive his earthly marching orders from his cousin Jesus.
- John was instructed by God the Father.
- He was told, “When you see the Holy Spirit descending on the One whom you are baptizing, then you will know that He is the Anointed One, the Messiah of God.”

- Of course, that happens at Jesus' baptism and John knows instantly that He is the Son of God.

John is clearly impressed with the major difference between his baptism and Christ's.

- John baptizes with (literally, *in*) water, but Jesus baptizes with (literally, *in*) the Holy Spirit.
- The difference is huge, and John realizes this. One is a mere picture; the other is the reality behind the picture.
- When John plunged sinners into the Jordan River, that rite symbolized the washing away of sins, for those Jews who had repented.
- On the Day of Pentecost those Jews who had repented and were baptized for the remission of sins received the gift of the Holy Spirit — Spirit *baptism*, if you will.

Peter said in his sermon:

- Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
- Though John the Baptist wasn't present at Pentecost to see it happen, he prophesied that it would happen.
- Jesus baptized *in Holy Spirit*, which is much more significant than John's water baptism.
- By announcing this, John is being humble.
- It's no wonder that Jesus said about His cousin:
- Matt. 11:11 Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was a man who humbly and unashamedly confessed Christ.

- Jesus makes some very special promises to those who confess Him before men.
- Matt. 10:32-33 Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.
- Luke 9:26 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.
- These texts have nothing to do with initial salvation (in the sense of regeneration).
- They are discipleship texts for believers with a reward attached, both positive and negative.

The positive reward is that if you confess Jesus before men He will confess you before the Father in heaven.

- Jesus is proud of His children who confess Him publicly.
- That is, they witness for Him, take a stand for Him, and defend His truth, etc.
- On the other hand, the negative reward is that if you deny Jesus before men, you will be denied before the Father and the angels — not denied eternal life; that can't happen, for we are eternally secure.
- But denied commendation and reward or, as the Luke passage says, "He will be ashamed of you."
- A good example of this is Peter, who denied Jesus for a time.
- Thankfully, Peter didn't remain in that carnal state.
- He confessed it and moved on and preached in great power on the Day of Pentecost, an act of confessing Jesus in spite of threat of persecution.
- Peter was also beaten and thrown in prison for confessing Christ, in Acts 3.

- Then, at the end of his life, history tells us that Peter was crucified as a martyr for Jesus — upside-down, per his request.
- Do you think Jesus will confess him in heaven?
- Absolutely!
- And He will confess you if you have confessed Him.

Perhaps you have heard of Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians in 18th century Germany.

- That special group of believers had a great love for Jesus and burning desire to see the world evangelized for His sake.
- Their emblem, which continues as the emblem of the Moravian Church today, is the Lamb of God with the flag of victory, surrounded by the motto "Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him."
- In 1732 two young Moravian men from Zinzendorf's community in Herrnhut, Germany surrendered to missions and believed God had called them to minister to the African slaves on the islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix in the West Indies.
- Supposedly, when they were told that they would not be allowed to do such a thing, the two men sold themselves to a slave owner and boarded a ship bound for the West Indies.

As the ship pulled away from the docks, it is said that they called out to their Moravian brethren on shore, "May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering!"

- John the Baptist did not live long enough to see the completed New Testament, so he was unaware of John the apostle's book of Revelation.
- But, as New Testament believers, we are privileged to learn one final truth about the Lamb of God.

- He is worthy of all praise!
- Rev. 5:11-12 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice:
 - "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
 - To receive power and riches and wisdom,
 - And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"
- Are you beholding the Lamb of God and finding Him worthy of your complete surrender?
- Someday all creation will find Him worthy and will sing His praise, and that includes you.
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS
-