

“John: Behold the Lamb”

Malachi 4:1-6 • John 1:19-34

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Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • September 11, 2022

Two weeks ago we finished our sermon series on Words You Should Know and at the same time began our new series on the Gospel of John. Over the next few months, as we make our way through John, we will get a clearer picture of who Jesus is and why He matters to your life.

The first thing we need to understand is why John wrote this book. John was one of Jesus' twelve disciples and was in the inner circle of three, along with his brother James and Peter. John was an eyewitness to all of Jesus' ministry. He also lived longer than any of the other disciples. By the time he wrote this gospel, the other three – Mark, Matthew, and Luke – were widely circulated among the churches. So we have to ask, why did John decide to write another one? Thankfully he tells us why he wrote it. John 20 says, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing *you may have life* in his name.” Everything in John is there to help you believe in and follow Jesus.

As we learned in the first part of John 1, Jesus is God in person. The God who created the entire universe and everything in it became human himself and lived in a particular time and place in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. That's known as the *incarnation*. But we also learned that he was in the world but the world didn't know him. He even came to his own people and they didn't recognize him. In fact, they rejected him and crucified him.

We were also introduced to John the Baptist. “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.” We learn more about John the Baptist in the

beginning of the Gospel of Luke. John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were both from priestly families. Zechariah was selected for the most prestigious job a priest could do – serving in the Temple on the Day of Atonement, the one day a year that a priest could enter the “Holy of Holies,” the place in the Temple where God's presence was.

When he went in he was met by the angel Gabriel who told him that he and Elizabeth would finally have a child in their old age. Then the angel explained, “he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will 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 for the Lord a people prepared.”

When John began preaching, it had been 400 years since God had sent a prophet to Israel. The book of Malachi, at the very end of the Old Testament, record the last Word from God before John came on the scene. The very last words of Malachi are, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.” For 400 years the Jewish people anticipated Elijah returning to make things ready for the Messiah.

Matthew tells us that John wore clothes made out of camel's hair and he ate locusts and wild honey. The picture we get is that he looked and acted and spoke like a prophet. You could say that John the Baptist was the last Old Testament prophet and Jesus even told his disciples that John the Baptist fulfilled the role of Elijah.

When John began preaching and baptizing, large crowds were coming to hear him. So many that the religious leaders became concerned. So they sent a delegation out to see

him. They said, "Who are you?" John's answers are interesting. He first says, "I'm not the Christ." The English translation loses some of the emphasis. He says in the most emphatic way that he is definitely NOT the Messiah. But that doesn't answer their question so they go down their list of possibilities. "Well then are you Elijah?" He says, "nope." So they ask, "Are you the Prophet?" They are referring to God's promise in Deuteronomy 18:18 to raise up a prophet like Moses, which actually refers to Jesus.

So the religious leaders are pretty frustrated and ask, "who the heck are you, then?" John quotes from Isaiah 40, saying, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" He then tells them that he is nobody compared to the Messiah. He points them to Christ. John 1:7-8 says that John came as a witness and that's what he does. He points everyone to Jesus.

You and I are called to be witnesses to Jesus as well. A role of a witness, for example in court, is to tell the truth about what he has seen and what he knows. That's our job. We are to tell people what we know about Jesus and what we have experienced. I think we can learn a lot from John the Baptist about how to be an effective witness for Christ.

The first step, as James Boice says, is to recognize that you are not the solution to other people's problems. John tells us that John the Baptist was not the light. He was the witness to the light. You are not the light, either. This takes a lot of humility, something that is sometimes lacking in Christians who are trying to be a witness for Christ. There is an Instagram page called "Preachers-N-Sneakers" that shows photos of so-called "celebrity pastors" preaching wearing very expensive shoes and clothes, like \$1000 sneakers and \$800 sweatshirts. That's about as far away from John the Baptist's humility as you can get. John said he wasn't even worthy to untie the Messiah's sandals. Disciples of

rabbis in those days had to do some pretty menial tasks for their rabbi. But untying sandals and washing feet was too lowly for them. It was reserved for the lowest slave in the household. John says that not only is that not beneath him, that he's actually not worthy enough to do that job.

The second step is that you must know personally that Jesus IS the light. Jesus is the solution to our greatest problem – separation from God because of sin. All of our other problems in life flow from that. But knowing that you are not the solution and that Jesus is the solution still does not make you a witness. The third step is to actually point people to Jesus and to help them believe. And that requires words. John said, "I am the voice." He is not the Word but he is the voice. You and I are also called to be the voice, sharing the Word of God with others, sharing the good news of life with Jesus with them.

Here again John the Baptist shows us how to do that. "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" The people who heard him say that would have immediately known what he meant. Sacrificial lambs were well known at the time as they were part of the daily sacrifices in the Temple. More importantly, the image of the sacrificial lamb comes from the Passover. The last plague that God sent on the Egyptians was the death of all the first-born in the land. But God instructed the Jewish people to sacrifice a lamb and brush the blood over the door of the house so that death would "pass over" that house. In the sacrifices the lamb or other animal takes the place of the sinner.

Jesus, as the perfect Lamb of God, takes our place. Because of our sin we deserve the punishment of death. But Jesus took that on himself on the cross so that we could have life with Him forever. Do you know that? Do you believe that? Does that make a difference in your life? And are you sharing that news with other people?

There was a lot that John the Baptist didn't understand about Jesus. He says, "I myself did not know him." He had baptized Jesus and had seen the Holy Spirit descend like a dove but he still had much to learn about the Christ. But John didn't let his lack of knowledge keep him

from telling others what he did know. It should be the same for you. As followers of Jesus, you and I should be telling people what we do know – behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Amen.