

1.14.23 – “Look, the Lamb of God”

John 1:19-34

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This is the final week of a short sermon series where we’ve been looking at the results of Christmas... I mentioned there is a cultural celebration of Christmas, that now seems to begin in the month of November, and ends on Dec. 26th. Historically, the Christian celebration of Christmas followed the season of Advent- and lasts for 12 days or so afterwards... Those are the days of Christmas feasting after a long season of waiting and expectation in Advent.

In the first week we looked at the Magi, men from the east who helped us reengage wonder and worship when we think about the Christ Child – God becoming flesh... Last week we looked at the flight of Jesus and His family to Egypt as they fled Herod’s order to kill all of the baby boys of Bethlehem... Through all of that, God’s sovereign purposes and plans protected Jesus... and fulfilled the Scriptures... In the same way for us, God’s sovereign plans are at work in our lives... His protection is at work in our lives...

Today, we are racing forward in the story- remember, Jesus spends 30 years in complete humble obscurity. He spends 5/6ths of his time on earth with no one knowing who He is... We have just one episode of His young life given to us by the Gospel writers- when He’s 12 years old, His family makes pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem for the Passover festival- they leave... and for three days they don’t realize He’s not in their traveling company!

My son, turns 12 next week. The thought of him being left somewhere for three days and me not knowing where he is, is incredible. When they finally realize it and return... they find Him in the temple, talking amongst the teachers, sitting and talking... The other day I was with Oliver and we had extra time. So we went to one of my favorite coffee shops and, at one point, I look over and he’s sitting next to me with a coffee in his hand, reading a book... and I’m like... who is this person? How old am I? What is happening?

Imagine what Mary and Joseph thought when they walked up and saw Jesus confidently talking with the Temple teachers. And He says, *“Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you expect that this is what I would be doing?”*

And that’s it... that’s all we have of Jesus’ young life...

As we close the season of Christmas- we now enter into what we call here at Park Road, the Season of the Son (Jesus Christ)... You could also call it the Season of Epiphany... TJ is going to begin a new series next week, during this season of the Son, looking at some of the discourses of Jesus’ teaching.

Before that, today we look at one more RESULT of Christmas, as I’m calling it, preparing us for what is to come in the next number of weeks.... After centuries of waiting... the long Advent expectation of Israel... the Chosen-one... the long-awaited Messiah- is here... among

us. John the Baptist tells us that He is here on the scene... But, He is here... not as expected... but as the Lamb of God.

So, three things I want us to briefly consider today –

1) The Voice of God 2) The Lamb of God, and 3) The Spirit of God.

1. The Voice of God –

There are a lot of fascinating names and characters in the Bible... one of them is John the Baptist... Jesus' mother Mary is told by the angel that her cousin Elisabeth, who was older, is also with child... and that child, is John the Baptist.

The one who leapt for joy in Elisabeth's womb.

Years and years later... the opening chapters of the Gospel accounts introduce us to the ministry of John the Baptist... He is a prophet who lived and ministered outside the cities and towns in the wilderness... and he preached a message of repentance... he invited Israel, to repent and be baptized... which at the time for Jews was a type of cleansing ritual...

His ministry and message becomes popular. And here in John 1, John, the disciple of Jesus and writer of the Gospel, tells us that the Jewish leaders sent a group- a group of Levites and Pharisees to go out and visit John and ask him what he's all about... Levites were the ones who were set aside to work in the Temple to make sure the Temple operated well. They were also thought to be a kind of Temple police force. So Pharisees and the police force, show up to ask John one significant question... *"Who are you?"*

"Are you claiming to be the Messiah?" You're kind of acting strangely, sort of like others that have had the crazy idea of saying they were the Messiah.

But John the Baptist says, *"No."*

We're about to get into the height of the political season... and we think about candidates... and we also perhaps think about people we WISH would be candidates but aren't.... You know when reporters ask people...

"Are you a candidate for President?" And the person replies...

"Let me be clear, I am NOT a candidate for president."

This is what's going on here with the leaders and John the Baptist.

I am NOT the Messiah.

They then ask, "Are you Elijah?" Now, that's a funny question... why would they ask that? Well, more than 400 years ago, the prophet Malachi said, ⁵ *"See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes."* Jews understood this to mean that one would come before the Messiah... an Elijah-type who will bring about the healing of Israel.

"Are you Elijah," they ask... and John the Baptist, curiously, also says, "No." We'll get back to that in just a minute...²² *Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"*

We need to know how to handle you.

v.³ 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.'"

Isaiah 40, a passage we hear often during the Advent season, says this, "³ A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

John is clear... this is who I am... I am the one clearing the way... preparing the path for the Messiah... for God in the flesh. And they say, well if you're not the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Great prophet... *why are you baptizing people?* And John's answer is... there is One already among you... He is here... I baptize with water... He will do something entirely different... of which I am not worthy... John the Baptist is showing deference here to Jesus... he is deflecting the spotlight off of his own specialness onto the coming Messiah. Elsewhere in the Gospels, he says, "*I must decrease, so that He might increase.*" Perhaps that's why John says, No I'm not Elijah... Because even Jesus Himself will later say that, in fact, John the Baptist was the Elijah promise... And that no man born of a woman was ever greater than John...

So what is the ministry of John the Baptist all about? His baptism was about preparing the way... preparing the people for something else. For the One who would come behind him...

It is the answer to the centuries of Advent hope... of longing for God to come... The Voice of God comes... in the wilderness... through John... proclaiming that the Chosen-One has come. Listen! Prepare... He is here. We see the voice of God at work...

But 2) We see the Lamb of God – v. ²⁹ *The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A Man Who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.'*

Keeping in mind what he was asked the day previous... Are you the Messiah... No, but He is here, He is coming... John does two things in v. 29 and 30 – First, he identifies Jesus as the One! This is the One Who I told you... Second, he calls Him the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world...

Now, it's important we stop and ask the question... many have asked this question... what does John mean, when he says the Lamb of God? *Or better yet... what is John the Baptist's definition of Lamb of God?*

And... what is the writer of this Gospel, John's definition of Lamb of God?

There are of course, references to the lamb, or how lambs are referred to throughout the Old Testament – There is the lamb of daily sacrifice... There is the scapegoat lamb that is put out of the camp carrying the people's sins... There is the lamb of Genesis 22 that takes the place of Isaac- There, of course, is the Passover lamb... that is used to celebrate the rescue of God's people from Egypt...

There is in Isaiah 53 – the Lamb which is led to the slaughter...
And of course, in the New Testament book of Revelation, there is a picture of the apocalyptic Lamb of God...
For John the Baptist, we can't be certain exactly what John the Baptist was saying when he said these words... this is something that DA Carson points out... why?
Because we know later in the Gospels... he will send some of his disciples to Jesus... and he will ask through them... hey, are you really the Messiah?
Because the way this is unfolding is not what I expected...
John did not have a full understanding of a suffering Messiah...
a suffering Lamb of God... A Messiah that seems to be giving up power at every turn...

And Jesus answers John's disciples... look around and see what's happening... the blind see, the deaf hear, the Gospel is being preached to the poor.... This is the work of the Messiah, of God in the flesh.

Now, John the writer of the Gospel... has the full picture of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection... He knows the fullness of what it means for Jesus to be the Lamb of God... He saw the full story play out... That yes, Jesus fulfills all of those uses of the lamb in Israel's history... That Jesus was indeed the Lamb led to the slaughter...
And it would be John, the writer himself, who would later write down his apocalyptic revelation that says:

Rev. 7:9 - 9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

You see, the New Testament shows us that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world through His suffering AND His triumph. He is both the suffering Lamb, and the triumphant Lamb...

He is the Lamb of God Whose sacrifice will wash away the sins of Israel, like the Passover lambs did for Israel in Egypt, and yet in His triumph... he becomes the Lamb of God not just for Israel, but moving out into the entire world... So that as Revelation 7 says...
the great multitude from every tribe, tongue and nation...
will declare, "Salvation belongs to the Lamb Who sits on the throne...
The Voice of God... in the wilderness....
Declares that the Lamb of God is here...
And the proof of this... the proof for us is...

3) The Spirit of God –

v.³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him. ³³ 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." ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

John the Baptist is recounting what had happened previously... it seems as if the baptism happened at another time before these words in John 1 – and what John again is testifying to is that Jesus of Nazareth... Whom he baptized... is God's Chosen One. Why? Because the Spirit of God is upon Him...

The heavens open. The Spirit descends upon Jesus. In another Gospel, we hear the audible words of Heaven declare, *"this is My Son, in Whom I am well pleased."*

Interestingly, when John says "I myself did not know Him..." He is not saying, I didn't know Who Jesus was or had never met Him... they were of course related through Mary... what he means is- I did not know until NOW that He was the Chosen One of God. But since the Spirit of God descended upon Him... I testify that He is God's Chosen One.

Throughout this series, we have seen that one of the greatest results of Christmas is the fulfillment of Scripture. And here again... 30 years after the birth of Christ... the Spirit comes upon and rests on Jesus and we remember these words from Isaiah 11 – *A Shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from His roots a Branch will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord— ³ and He will delight in the fear of the Lord.*

For John, the writer of this good news... all of this... including John the Baptist's testimony... is to support his chief focus as he writes his Gospel... which is to declare that Jesus is the Christ, and that, by believing, you may have life in His Name.

The voice of God in the wilderness... preparing the way....

The Lamb of God Who has come to take away the sins of the world...

And the Spirit of God that confirms the gift of Christmas...

that God himself, God the Son has come into the world in Jesus Christ.

Now, there are two things I want to close with by way of application, as we wrap up this Christmas season and turn the corner into the New Year...

When we think about the results of Christmas-

Re-engaging wonder and worship- like the Magi...

Trusting in the sovereign plans and protection of God, like Joseph and Mary did when they fled to Egypt... And watching the Spirit of God confirm that Jesus, once the Christ Child... is God's Son, the Lamb of God...

These results – should fill us with gratitude and confidence.

How could we not be overwhelmed with gratitude?

You see, the Christian life is about coming to terms with the fact that, on our own, left to our own devices, we cannot sort out our lives. We cannot keep ourselves from sin... or heading into directions that will, ultimately, not be for our good...

I have felt, many times over in my life... as I'm sure you have...

that I am a wandering sheep with no idea where I'm going. And on my own...

I just continue to look around every rock, or into every corner to find something shiny or new. Most of the time I am seeking something that will make me happy, or safe, or satisfy me in that moment...

And this is what the world offers... it offers temporary answers to questions around our happiness, our safety, and our significance. But, ultimately, these things will not be able to hold up under the weight of our natural desire to wander and look for more...

We need something outside of ourselves... to do for us what we would never choose or do for ourselves. We need God, in the flesh... in Jesus Christ... to become the Sacrifice for our sins, that we might be made new in Him. That we might be made free now to no longer wander, but to find ourselves safe and secure in the freedom and love of Christ. And living in that way will fill your life with gratitude.

There have been all these studies done by scholars and psychologists on the power of gratitude. The world knows that gratitude is very important. Yet think of how limited the sources of gratitude in the world are...

Instead, our source of gratitude is that our sins have been forgiven by a Holy God, the Creator of all things... who has sought to know us in Jesus...

Gratitude then, gives way to confidence...

When the Spirit rests on Jesus... he is confirmed by God the Father...
this is My Son... He is confirmed in the eyes of John the Baptist...
THIS IS THE CHOSEN ONE of God!!

I want us all to hear this today... the kind of confidence that Jesus has at His baptism... the kind of confidence that John the Baptist has in Jesus...

It is available to you and me also... How?

Because the same Spirit that came to rest upon Jesus... now rests upon you!

In Jesus... you are God's beloved son... His beloved daughter...

And through the forgiveness of sins that comes through Jesus' sacrifice...

God is well pleased by you.

You are loved. You are accepted... You are known...

That provides a kind of confidence that the world could never provide.

And as we circle back... it fills us with gratitude.

It helps us to trust in the sovereign plans and protection of God.

and it leads us to wonder and worship.

This is what God has done in coming to us in Jesus Christ.

The Christ child... The Lamb of God. The Chosen one.

Let's Pray.

