

John The Baptist Declares Jesus To Be The Lamb Of God.

Text: John 1:29-34

1) The wonderful meaning of this title

Suggested Hymns:

2) John's Proof For His Testimony Concerning Jesus

1, 13, 323, 848, 11

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 1:29-34, 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!"* ³⁰ *"This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'* 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.'* ³⁴ *"And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

As the months passed, John the Baptist's insistent call to repentance caused such a stir that the religious leaders in Jerusalem felt it necessary to take some sort of action. Their uneasiness had been increased by the report that people were wondering whether John is actually the promised Messiah.¹ They therefore sent a delegation of priests and Levites to make a first-hand investigation.

Evidently John had also learned about this rumour concerning himself and welcomed the opportunity to dispose of it. Hence, when the priests asked him, **"Who are you?"** his reply was, **"I am not the Christ."**² With this prompt and clear-cut denial of the rumour John revealed his sterling character and his complete faithfulness to Christ.

The priests, satisfied about this important point, went on to ask, ***“Who are you then?”*** John’s reply to this was equally final and impressive; he declared that he was the ***“voice”*** in the wilderness of whom Isaiah had written, and that he was preparing the way of the Lord.

After this exchange with the priests and Levites a committee of the Pharisees in Jerusalem wished to know by whose authority John was baptising. John’s answer was to the effect that he was doing so by authority of ***“One among you”*** who was already in their midst and was soon to be made manifest.

With these interviews behind him, John returned to his regular work. He did not know that his witness-bearing was soon to enter upon a new and exalted phase. While preaching as usual on the next day, he looked up and, behold, there was Jesus coming toward him! The hour to which John must have been looking forward had come! We can imagine how profound the effect must have been on the multitude when he pointed to the Lord and proclaimed in a loud voice, ***“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”***

Before this John’s message had been primarily, ***“Repent! Prepare for the Coming One!”*** But now it was largely, ***The Lord is come! Open your hearts to receive Him!***

What better preparation for the coming Christmas season could there be for us than to gain a deeper insight into the heavenly mission of the Christ Child by studying these wonderful words of His forerunner, John the Baptist! Let us consider John’s testimony to Christ. ***Behold! the Lamb of God.*** May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Wonderful Meaning Of This Title

The depth of John’s emotions and, above all, the tremendous significance of what he had to say about Jesus found expression in the dramatic summons to the multitude, ***“Behold!”*** Jesus who was approaching deserved not only their undivided attention, but also the highest trust and love and loyalty of all! Why? Because He is the great Lamb of God!

Even though the people did not have the understanding of this expressive title that John did, yet something of its tremendous importance could not escape them.

For months John had been speaking to them about sin and God's judgment upon it, and also about repentance and the Baptism of remission of sins.

In the Israelite's mind the lamb was closely associated with sacrifices to God for sin. This is not surprising, because in the sacrifices of the Old Testament the lamb was the animal most frequently used. Lambs without blemish were offered twice daily at the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, on the Day of Atonement, and on other occasions.

These ever-recurring sacrifices were to remind the Israelites of their sinfulness in God's sight and to direct their thoughts forward to the Messiah, the great Lamb without "*blemish or spot,*" without sin of His own, who would pour out His life-blood in actual atonement for all sin.

Isaiah, seven hundred years before, had given a remarkable expression to this comforting Gospel truth when he said that the promised Messiah would be "*brought as a lamb to the slaughter,*" and that He would be "*wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.*"³

In view of this we may surely assume that many people listening to John must have perceived that he was assuring them that this Jesus was the great Lamb promised of old by God for the salvation of all. They also believed that John's Baptism, which they had received, could bring them forgiveness only because of this Lamb's approaching sacrifice. How their hearts must have "*burned within them*" when they turned to gaze upon Jesus! Whether they realised it or not, the long night of waiting was over and the new day of grace was dawning!

However, the full Gospel truth of the effectiveness of the approaching sacrifice of this Lamb these people had not yet grasped. As yet they did not understand the glorious truth that it would be for believers of all time and that it would atone for the sin of all mankind!

Most Israelites thought of salvation as something that was meant only for them as descendants of God's faithful servant Abraham. Their vision should not have been so limited because many prophecies had declared that the Gentiles were to share in Israel's blessing.

They should have remembered that when God chose Abraham to be the father of their nation, He said to him that in his Seed "*all families of the earth*"

would be *“blessed.”*⁴ They should have recalled that in Psalm 2:8 God says to His Son, *I will give You The nations for Your inheritance.* And Psalm 22:27 declares *“all the families of the nations Shall worship before You.”*

They also failed to bear in mind God’s inspired words to the Messiah about the Gentiles, *“I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”*⁵ And the Messiah’s words to Israel, *The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.*⁶

But if it seems strange that there was little understanding of the universal salvation among the people, what shall we say of the remarkable fact that later even the Apostle Peter, although he had heard Christ say just before returning to heaven *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,”*⁷ nevertheless hesitated to bring the Gospel to the Roman centurion Cornelius until the ascended Lord appeared to him in a special vision and declared to him that *“in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.”*⁸

We who are of the Gentiles have great reason to rejoice that the Lord had His forerunner testify that Jesus, as the Lamb of God, would take away the sin of the world. Later Jesus Himself declared in John 3:16,¹⁶ *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

And in John 8:12, *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”* We thank the Saviour also for commissioning Paul to be His Apostle to the Gentiles, and for inspiring His beloved Apostle John to write that *“Jesus is the Propitiation for ... the sins of the whole world.”*⁹

2. John’s Proof For His Testimony Concerning Jesus

No greater or more wonderful truth has ever been proclaimed than that which came from the lips of John in the desert! *Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* In it lies our hope in life and in death!

But how could John be so certain that the lowly Jesus walking toward him really was, and is, this great Lamb of God? What proof had he to offer? He had proof both marvellous and irrefutable! He tells us about it in our text.

He says, ***“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.’”*** In other words, the Father had promised John that He would identify the Lamb of God!

John’s certainty, and our faith, were not to rest on evidence which could be questioned, but rather on the testimony and revelation of God Himself! Truly, John must have rejoiced over this promise and must have eagerly looked forward to its fulfilment, especially since, as he says, ***I did not know Him.***

With these words John could hardly have meant that he did not know anything about Jesus. We reach this conclusion when we recall the relationship between Elisabeth, the mother of John, and the Virgin Mary. Recall, also, the wonderful events which marked the birth of John, and the still more wonderful events which accompanied the birth of Jesus.

Finally, we think of the inspiring prophecy which John’s father, Zacharias, delivered at his son’s circumcision concerning his divinely appointed mission as ***“the prophet of the Highest.”***¹⁰ Surely, we are justified in assuming that John knew about Jesus and he may even have had his own personal thoughts about Him. But personal thoughts would not do! “A prophet’s certainty must come from a higher source, one that is beyond all question.”¹¹

The fact that John waited until God had given him definite proof that Jesus was the promised Lamb of God eloquently proclaims his trustworthiness as a prophet.

How did God fulfil this promise? John tells us, saying, ***“I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.*** From the Gospel of Matthew¹² we learn that God wrought this miracle after Jesus had been baptised by John and came out of the water. In those solemn moments John saw the heavens open, heard the Father declare, ***“This is My beloved Son,”*** and then saw the Holy Spirit slowly descending in the visible form of a dove and alighting on Jesus!

Here was the glorious fulfilment! How John must have been thrilled! First, by this marvellous manifestation of the Holy Trinity, then, by the Father’s definite and convincing testimony about Jesus as His Son, and finally, by the

wonderful anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit for His threefold office as our Prophet, Priest, and King.

After this we understand John's words, *This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'* According to His human nature, Jesus "came," was born, about six months after John; but according to His divine nature He was before John; yes, was "*before the world began,*" as Jesus later said in His high-priestly prayer.¹³

Jesus, according to His divine nature, was "before" John, not only in time, but also in glory and power! John was the humble forerunner but Jesus was the eternal and beloved Son of God, the "*Messenger of the Covenant*" of grace and life,¹⁴ the Lamb of God. John had to be authorised by God to baptise "*for the remission of sins*"; Jesus, through His vicarious obedience to God's holy Law and His vicarious suffering and death, won forgiveness for all the world and then, in His gracious power, ordained Baptism as the washing of regeneration until the end of time. Jesus made both John's Baptism and our own Baptism effective.

God had told John that the One upon whom he would "*see the Spirit descending*" would "*baptize with the Holy Spirit.*" These words pointed forward to what Christ would do after He had completed His great mission on earth and had returned to the glory of the Father.

Therefore, until Judgment Day, Jesus saving work as the Messiah would concern itself with having the benefits of His redemption applied to people everywhere. In this great work of grace the Holy Spirit was to be His and the Father's active and glorious Agent! Through the divine Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit was to call men out of spiritual darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit would turn them from sin and eternal judgment to faith in the remission won by Christ and to the glorious hope of the children of God!

To initiate this glorious work, Christ, upon His return to the Father, would "*baptize with,*" or "*pour out,*" the Holy Spirit. Christ fulfilled this promise ten days after He had ascended to heaven, on Pentecost Day!

Through that baptism by the Holy Spirit, Christ's chosen Apostles were fully endowed to be the inspired and inerrant teachers of the New Testament. On that

day they were, as Jesus had promised, brought to full understanding of the saving truth which He had proclaimed to them.¹⁵

But the ascended Christ's baptising with the Holy Spirit has continued ever since, and it will go on until He returns to gather all faithful believers in order to present them at the throne of God as the glorious fruits of His redemption!

Wherever the inspired Word of His Apostles is read or proclaimed and His Sacraments are administered, there Jesus is present and sends His Holy Spirit to call and convert sinners and to strengthen and comfort believers. All who are won to faith in Christ by this baptism of the Holy Spirit are brought to rest in God and are filled with the hope of eternal life.

Furthermore with the love-of Christ and the glow of the Holy Spirit's fire in their souls, they shed the works of darkness and sin and seek to live as children of light, to draw others to the Lord in order that they, too, may be baptised with the Holy Spirit and thus be added to His kingdom! Thus the believers become co-workers with Christ and His Spirit!

As we contemplate what we have heard today — the Father's declaration that Jesus is His beloved Son, the Holy Spirit's visible descent upon Jesus, John's inspired testimony that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world and who baptises with the Holy Spirit — we cannot help feeling how uninspiring, shallow, and devoid of all comfort for us sinners the popular teaching of our day is!

Modern teaching so often represents Jesus merely as "the Ideal Man" who gave us the finest example of noble living and who, for this reason, was honoured by God in being "adopted" by Him as His "Son."

Such a Christ would not have met our desperate needs! Such a Christ would have left us in our sins and without hope! We, being sinners, need a Christ who has redeemed us and who through His Spirit makes us children of a heavenly birth! Such a Christ we have!

Therefore we can look up and sing with gratitude and joy,¹⁶

*Blessèd are the sons of God;
They are bought with Christ's own blood,
They are ransomed from the grave,*

Life eternal they shall have. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 3:15

² John 1:20

³ Isa 53:5,7

⁴ Gen. 12:3; 22:18

⁵ Isaiah 49:6

⁶ Isaiah 60:3

⁷ Matthew 28:19

⁸ Acts 10:35

⁹ 1 John 2:2

¹⁰ Luke 1:76

¹¹ Lenski's *John*, p. 127

¹² Matthew 3:16

¹³ John 17:5

¹⁴ Malachi 3:1

¹⁵ Cf. John 16:7,13-15.

¹⁶ Hymn 323