

"Look, the Lamb of God...!"

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[0 : 0 0] So that's John's Gospel, chapter 1, beginning at verse 19. Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.

He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, I am not the Messiah. They asked him, then who are you? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not.

Are you the prophet? He answered, no. Finally they said, who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?

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. Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?

I baptize with water, John replied, but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

[1 : 1 2] This all happened in Bethany, on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day, John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is the one I meant when I said, A man who comes after me has surpassed me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.

Then John gave this testimony, I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 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.

I have seen and testify that this is God's chosen one. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Great. It would be great if you could keep your Bibles open at that page, 1,063, as we look at that together. And there's an outline inside the notice sheet, if you find that helpful, to see where we're going.

[2 : 3 3] Let's pray and ask for God's help as we turn to his word. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. Well, it was an awful week in the news. Events today still ringing through from Barcelona, as we learned that there was a British boy killed there with this shocking...

They're still looking for the van driver who drove into people there. There was news from Finland of somebody that they're treating as a terrorist incident, stabbing people there. And then these awful images from America of these riots and far-right marches and racism and so on.

And it felt to me, I don't know about you, in the sense we've sort of had our Scottish summer holidays, and suddenly they're over now. And we've sort of crashed back down to earth in terms of the news.

And those events are just one example, one week's example, of how there is something terribly wrong with the world, because the world is clearly ravaged by death and by injustice.

[3 : 47] And we've made so much technological progress, but actually the 21st century has begun in just the same way as every other century, in terms of death and injustice.

And we might be left wondering, as I know often people do wonder, if there is a God and He is good, why is He putting up with that? Why doesn't He just crumple up this world in the way that we might crumple up a picture that we know has gone wrong and throw it in the waste paper bin?

But last week we started this series in John's Gospel, and we heard instead this astonishing counterclaim from John that God, rather than give up on the world, has entered our world.

The eternal Word has become flesh and made His dwelling among us. And John tells us that we can have life through that Son.

So He's come so that if we believe in Jesus, we trust Him, and turn to God through Him, we get life in a world that's marred by death. And it would be understandable, first hearing that, to be sceptical.

[4 : 52] And so what John then does is present us with witness after witness to give us evidence so that we can believe and then have this life that's promised.

And he begins with John the Baptist. So it's a bit confusing because John the Gospel writer is writing about John, but it's not the same John. It's John the Baptist. And John himself, John the Apostle, never refers to himself as John in the Gospel.

So hopefully we'll keep track. And we pick up the story of John the Baptist when he's causing quite a stir. You could even say he's making a splash. Okay?

That's got slightly more of a laugh than it did this morning. I've called it on the sheets, an intriguing introduction. Look with me at verses 19 and 20. Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.

He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, I am not the Messiah. He goes on, verse 21. They say, are you Elijah?

[5 : 59] I am not. Are you the prophet? There was a prophet promised in the time of Moses, who would be like Moses, and would draw God's people back to him.

Are you the prophet? No. It's quite weird, isn't it, this little section. I don't know whether you've thought about that. I was conscious that there's a few people in our church family who are teachers who've started teaching last week, new term, in new schools.

And when you arrive somewhere like that for the first time, obviously we have a set of questions that we ask people to get to know them. And we might say, what's your name? What do you do?

Where are you from? And we get these answers. But imagine if, you know, I met someone for the first time, and I met you for the first time, and instead of that I just said to you, I am not a teacher at Hillhead School.

I am not a rugby player for Glasgow Warriors. I am not a politician. You'd be thinking, there is an easier way to do this, to get some positive answers.

[7 : 02] So what's going on here with John the Baptist? Well, what it's showing us is that John the Baptist is a really big deal. A really big deal. We can tell that from the kind of people they think he might be.

If you think, like, if I met someone new for the first time and said, I am not the first minister of Scotland, they would think, why would we think you were the first minister of Scotland?

This is crazy. And yet, they think that John the Baptist might be one of these extraordinary people promised in the Old Testament.

Clearly, John the Baptist is a phenomenon for them to think that's even possible. And that's why they send this delegation. It's like the equivalent of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi and the Vatican Council sending a delegation to find this man and work out what on earth is going on.

John tells us almost in passing, in verse 28, where it's happening. It's in the Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River. We're not quite sure where it was, but archaeologists think they found this site that's in kind of modern-day Jordan where there are tributaries leading into the Jordan River.

[8 : 15] And there are the remains of churches there that were built within a century of these events. So probably where John the Baptist was. And the point is, well, partly, John reminding us, what he's writing here is rooted in history.

These events took place on the soil of the Middle East. But also, this is the wilderness. And it's nowhere near the kind of major Jewish settlements like Jerusalem.

And yet, such is the impact of this man, John, that people are coming from everywhere. They're going out into the desert, pilgrimage to him. They're turning back to God through him as they listen to him.

They're being baptized by him. And the point is, that the greater someone is, the more impact it has when they say, actually, the message has nothing to do with me.

It's about somebody else. That's what makes John's answer so meaningful. In verse 23, he finally gives them some more positive detail about who he is.

[9 : 25] When they say, who are you? Tell us so we can tell the people who sent us. Verse 23, 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. So there was someone promised in the Old Testament who was just a messenger, a signpost, because the Lord is coming.

And John the Baptist is him. Now that promise was made, it's in Isaiah chapter 40, and it was made, looking ahead by Isaiah, to a time when God's people would be in exile. So God's people had been chosen by God, rescued by him, brought out of Egypt, into the promised land, given God's law, in order to continue enjoying the blessing of relationship with God.

And they had to remain faithful to God. And they failed to do that. And he sent prophets to warn them, and they continually failed to do that. They worshipped other gods. And so he sent them into exile.

And that promise in Isaiah, of forthcoming exile, looking beyond that, in Isaiah chapter 40, you get this message of comfort, for when the people are in exile, that the day will come, when a rescue will happen again.

[10 : 37] And God will bring his people back, into the land. So Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3, in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the desert, a highway for our God.

It's going to be like a new exodus, for them. The long awaited rescue, is going to happen. Just imagine, if you'd been there, in the crowds of people, perhaps camping out, to get baptized by John, and to listen to John.

And then he says this, verse 26, I baptize with water, but among you, stands one, you do not know, he is the one, who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals, I am not worthy, to untie.

And John leaves us hanging there. John himself, doesn't know who it is. But he's trusting, the word of God, that among those coming, to be baptized, will be, the promised one, the Lord, come to rescue his people.

So we're left overnight, and verse 29, we read, the next day, John saw Jesus, coming towards him, and said, look, the Lamb of God, who takes away, the sin of the world.

[11 : 53] And to confirm, this is the preexistent one, come from heaven. He says, this is the one I meant, when I said, a man who comes after me, has surpassed me, because he was before me. I myself, did not know him, but the reason, I came baptizing with water, was that he might be revealed, to Israel.

So I think, John the Baptist, and Jesus were related, he probably knew him personally, but he didn't know, this is the one, the spirit empowered one, God with skin on, come to rescue his people.

He says in verse 23, that he'd been given, this word of revelation, that he would see, the spirit descend, on God's anointed one. And so then, Jesus steps in the river, and verse 32, John says, I saw the spirit, come down from heaven, as a dove, and remain on him.

So John sees, that vision, that we hear from the other, gospel writers as well, of the dove, coming down, as the spirit resting, on Jesus. And because of that, John just gets out of the way.

What he wants us to do, is just look at Jesus, he's pointing to Jesus. I was reading, recently about, John Calvin, at the time of the Reformation.

[13 : 08] He was, one of the big issues, in kind of the medieval church, was relics. People are obsessed, with these relics. And you sort of give money, where there was a relic. So that's one of the reasons, they were attractive to have.

You wanted relics. And Calvin, one of the ways he tried, to sort of blow up, explode the idea, of all these relics, that were being worshipped, and adored, was to show that, loads of them, weren't real.

So he decided to document, just how many, of these relics were around. And he's got this list, and there were these, sort of really weird, bits of the list. And one of them is, fingers of John the Baptist, that pointed out Jesus.

Nine. Okay. So in all, there were nine different churches, or monasteries, or sites, saying we've got the finger, of John the Baptist. Of course the point is, forget about the fingers.

Forget about John. Look where he's pointing, at the promised one. And he wants us to remember, these two titles. So first point this evening, Jesus is a lamb, who takes away sin.

[14 : 13] Secondly, he'll be the chosen one. So he's the lamb, who takes away sin. And the first, there were two big ideas, we have to kind of, put in as pegs in the ground, to understand what it means, that Jesus is the lamb, who takes away sin.

Ideas from the Old Testament. And the first is, that sin, deserves, death. Sin is our rebellion, against God, living in his world, but not living his way.

And our sin, is very serious, because it matters to God. So that he, when he first gave a command, to a human, you mustn't eat from the tree, for the day you eat of it, you will surely die.

If you disobey God, in his world, it deserves death. And the problem is, that we don't think, sin is as serious, as God does. I think that's true, of lots of our rule breaking, in life.

And in the news, just over a week ago, I don't know whether you saw, but there was this news thing, about a hospital in Cardiff, the NHS Trust in Cardiff, had taken a bunch of NHS staff, to court, for failing to pay parking fines.

[15 : 22] There were parking spaces, around the hospital, that were there, for visitors only. And the staff were parking in them, and getting fines, and ignoring them. So they were getting, you know, fines were racking up, and accumulating, and they were getting more, and more of them.

And then they were taken to court, and there was, one nurse, who owed £150,000, in parking fines, that she hadn't paid. And the judge said, you've got to pay the fines.

Now, of course, there'll be more to it, and it's easy to feel sorry, for these workers, who now have to pay, a lot of money, to the NHS Trust. But at the same time, the reason why, the judge said you've got to pay, was the rules, were really clear, about parking.

And the people, just carried on, flagrantly, disobeying them. And it's worth thinking, why did they keep, offending, even though the fines, were adding up.

And three reasons, just to go through. First of all, they brought the rules, because they disagreed, that there should be rules, on the parking. So the NHS Trust, were trying to balance, the interests of, we've got staff, we've got visitors.

[16 : 31] But the staff, who were parking, in the wrong places, they resented, that there were regulations. And we're a bit like that, with God. We live in his world, but we resent the idea, that he can tell us, what's right and wrong, in his world.

What's best, in his world. We think, well I want to make up my own mind, what's right and wrong. Can't he just trust me? The second reason, they brought the rules, was because they thought, even though the rules were there, they would be exempt.

They kind of thought, well, yeah, I know that, you know, you're not allowed to partner, unless you're a visitor, but, we're NHS staff. So, it doesn't count for us. Just as we, when it comes to God, and his rules, so often we think, yeah, I know God, has got his commandments, and so on, he's holy, and he's got his will, but, you know, he's not going to judge me.

I'm British. Maybe you think, I'm Scottish. You won't judge the Scottish. I'm a teacher, I'm a doctor, I'm a good person, I've got a family. We think we've got, some kind of, diplomatic immunity, from God's rules.

I even go to church sometimes. God's not going to mind, if I break those rules. And, with these parking fines, the third reason, why they kept on, breaking the rules, again and again, and just let the fines accumulate, was because, simply, they just never thought, that it would be enforced.

[17 : 56] They didn't think, the NHS would really, take them to court, and that the judge, would make them pay the money. Maybe they even thought, I owe so much, it would be a bit embarrassing, for the NHS to say, you've got to pay.

But the day in the courtroom, did come, and there was no last minute let off. The rules, are the rules. And the same way, lots of us go through our lives, thinking, we can just wing it, and, that even if we break the rules, we'll kind of get away with it.

But when it comes to God, that's a terrible mistake. mistake, because, we will all have, our day in his courtroom. And you might be here, this evening thinking, yeah well, I've, I'm not sure about all this, because, I don't really have much to do with God, but, I seem to be getting on just fine, in life.

But that, is, part of the problem, for us. Because the Bible never says, that if you ignore God, your whole life, you'll be deeply unhappy. You could be somebody, who has nothing to do with God, and is very happy.

But, the Bible would have it, that all the good things, in our lives, and in our world, come from God himself. And if we, enjoy those things, but, ignore God, the day will come, when he will give us, what we've chosen, and, withdraw himself from us, and take those good things, from us.

[19 : 25] So that's our first principle, sin deserves death. But, in the Bible, we also get a second principle, and it's that, a substitute, is allowed. We're familiar with, substitutes, aren't we?

I think of, playing five a side football, and usually, if you're playing five a side, you kind of want, seven players. So that when you're knackered, you can just, signal to one of your mates, and you come off, and they come on, and they take your position.

That's a substitute. And woven through, the story of the Old Testament, is the idea, that you can have a substitute, to bear the, to take your place, when it comes to judgment, from God.

So when God rescues, his people from Egypt, he decides, the way he does that, is he decrees, that his judgment, will fall on Egypt, on all the families, who've sinned.

But anybody, who has, who trusts God, and believes his promise, can bring a lamb, into their home, and sacrifice the lamb, and the lamb, takes the place, of the firstborn son, in that case, and God's judgment, falls on the lamb, instead.

[20 : 34] When Israel then, is in the land, and builds a temple, they bring sin offerings, to God. They bring animals, into the temple, and the lamb, again, is a substitute.

And the lamb is killed, as a sacrifice, and the sinner, walks away forgiven. Of course, it's just a picture, it could never really be, that an animal, could really swap places, in God's eyes, with a human.

But God was teaching, to prepare, the principle, for when John declares, look, the lamb of God, who takes away, the sin of the world.

It's so inclusive, isn't it? The sin of the world. All of us have sinned, and all of us deserve, eternal death. But, Jesus has come, to live the life, that we should have lived, so that he can then, die the death, we should have died, to take our sin away.

So that if we're willing, to turn from our sin, and accept that offer, of free forgiveness, we are completely forgiven. Perhaps you're someone, who's already accepted, that for yourself.

[21 : 40] And yet, you can think, of something you've done, that really still, frustrates you. Something you've done, that you feel awful about, and you have this burden, of guilt about.

Perhaps you could think, of a wrong thing, you've said to somebody, that really harmed them, and you really wish, you hadn't said it. But when we talk to God, about any of that, it's as though he says, I've forgotten.

I don't know, what you're talking about. I will never treat you, as though you did that thing. Because, the lamb, has taken your sin, away. You're forgiven.

Right near the end, of the Falklands War, there was a battle, for Port Stanley. And the key element, of that battle, in the Falklands War, was a battle, over a particular mount, Mount Longdon.

And it was occupied, by the Argentinian troops. And the British, there was a British platoon, that one night, went round, to try and, get over to Mount Longdon.

[22 : 42] And they were being rained on, by machine gun fire, from the mountain. And Ian Mackay, was the platoon sergeant. He and a few, of the other soldiers, from the platoon, went on ahead a bit, to try and, get to grips, with what was going on, on this mount.

And his commander, was shot. And he saw other people, in the platoon, shot as well. He knew, that if he did nothing, they were as good as gone, and the hill, was lost.

So he looked, and he ran up the side, of the hill, along a hedgerow, along the top of the ridge, took hold of his grenade, pulled the pin out, and threw himself, into the machine gun pit.

There was a huge explosion, and then it was quiet. And it was done. And the troop marched on, and took the hill. I don't know, what those soldiers thought, of Ian Mackay.

Maybe before that day, they'd not thought much, about him at all. Just another soldier, in their platoon. But after that, I bet they thought about him, a lot. He was awarded, the Victoria Cross.

[23 : 47] There was a reunion, a few years later, of soldiers, and their families. His mother said, what was most moving, about being there, was speaking to other mums, who spoke to her, and knew that their sons, wouldn't have been alive, if it wasn't that her son, had given his life, so that they could live.

Now as we hear, John the Baptist, we learn, that something like that, is wonderfully true, for us. I don't know, what you've thought, about Jesus Christ before.

Maybe you're someone, who thinks, I've not had a lot, to do with him. But when you realize, that Jesus did this, for you, it changes your whole life. The reason, that the eternal son of God, came into our world, was that he was moved, by love, for you and me, so that he, the lamb of God, came to die, for you.

Now we move on, to John's second, exclamation, about Jesus. He's a chosen one, who brings us, the spirit. Three times, John describes himself, as baptizing, with water.

I don't know, whether you noticed that. He keeps saying it. It's as though, he's saying, don't get fixated, about me. I just get people wet. That's all I can do. And then he says, end of verse 33, he is the one, who will baptize, with the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 12] Now John has already, spoken through the prophet, Isaiah, Isaiah 40, quoting that, I'm the voice of one, calling in the wilderness. Now, if you just turn on, a couple of chapters, in Isaiah, you don't need to do it now, but in Isaiah chapter 42, we learn more about, this rescue, that God's going to bring, and it's through a servant, Isaiah 42, here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one, in whom I delight.

So that phrase, chosen one, John the Baptist, seems to be getting, that phrase, from Isaiah 42. two. And the next thing, that Isaiah promises, the Lord promises through him, of this chosen one, is I will put my spirit, on him, and he will bring justice, to the nations.

Here is the one, God promises, will bring justice, for the world, put it right. And just as the spirit, abides in him, big John word, the spirit, remains in him, when we come to him, we come and abide in Christ, he gives that spirit to us, as we connect ourselves to him.

Now why does he do that? He does it, because, again, the reason God's people, in the Old Testament, had failed, the reason we needed, a New Testament, was because, they couldn't keep, their part, of the bargain, with God.

God says, I'll rescue you, I'll bless you, you'll be my people, in my place, enjoying the blessing, of relationship with me. All you have to do, is, continue in faith, in me.

[26 : 45] And they failed to do that. Now they're back, in the promised land, but a change of address, doesn't help. And it's true, of any of us.

The problem is that, to have faith in Jesus, you have to turn, from your sin, acknowledge that it's wrong, ask for forgiveness, turn back to God, through him.

And on our own, without the spirit of God, none of us, is willing to do that. So God promises, through Ezekiel, a new covenant, where he will put his spirit, in his people, to move them, to keep his laws.

In other words, the spirit, comes into our lives, and changes our hearts, and moves us, to trust God, and to love God, so that our desires change, and we can live for him, as his people.

So this baptism, of the spirit, is a key part, of this New Testament promise. It's the chance, of a fresh start with God, a new life, knowing God, that starts the day, you trust Jesus, and never ends.

[27 : 50] A new life, where the spirit, comes to change us, to make us the people, God redeemed us to be, moving us to do God's will. So we've heard about, the lamb, who takes away our sin, and the chosen one, who brings God's spirit to us.

As we finish, thirdly, just think about, a Baptist, who shows us the way. What do we learn, from John the Baptist? Well first, we learn from his testimony, and there may be, some of us here, who are not yet believers, others who are struggling, to believe.

And in a sense, John's gospel here, is like a courtroom document. We're gathering evidence, from the time. Consider the testimony, of John the Baptist.

The apostle John, wants us to know, here is a witness, who knew his Bible, who heard from God, and in a real place, by the Jordan River, he saw, this vision, of the dove, descending on Jesus, in order that he could, point to the man, and say, this is the one.

And we hear, from what he says about him, that the stakes, could not be higher. For all of us have sinned, we know we have. And we deserve death, for that. And John claims here, that there is an offer, that can deal with that sin.

[29 : 09] But we're also reminded, as we weigh up, that courtroom evidence, to have humility. humility. Because, the problem Jesus, has come to fix, in our hearts, is so serious, we can't even see it, properly, ourselves.

And we need, to have the humility, to ask for that second gift, the gift of the spirit of God, so that we can, discern, and see the truth, about Jesus, and respond rightly.

So that's John's testimony. We could also learn, from his spirituality. John the Baptist, is creating, this extraordinary following, as a very spiritual man. And the truth is, he's a Bible man.

He knew his Bible. Many of us, will have known these truths, about Jesus for a long time. But could we, imitate John the Baptist's, passion, for the Bible?

In a sense, all that he says, about Jesus here, all he declares about him, he knew, from reading Isaiah, and reading Ezekiel. So that he had, this rich expectation, about God, and his anointed one.

[30 : 17] Could we be people, committed, to the Old Testament? And as well as, his spirituality, just last of all, consider John's humility. He was a man who, for his time, had achieved, true greatness.

The fame, the following, everyone talking about him, the popularity. But he just wanted, to get out of the way, so that people, so that people, could see Jesus.

And today, there's something, very attractive, about a Christian, who has lots about them, that the world, really admires. But they're willing, to scorn, the popularity of the world, for the sake of, pointing out Jesus, to other people.

I wonder, could you be somebody, who ranks your sense of success, not by your, braininess, or your, sportiness, or your salary, or your postcode, that you live in, or the achievements, of your children.

Could you rank, your sense of success, by, how well, you've pointed out Jesus, to other people. If you just think about times, when we do get an opportunity, to say something, about Jesus, even if it's just, on a Monday, and people say, what did you do, at the weekend?

[31 : 34] And you say, I went to church. I was thinking, when people give me, an opportunity, to speak about Jesus, when I think about, the kinds of things I say, I reckon what's going on, under the surface, a lot of the time, is I'm thinking, how do I, get through this conversation, saying something about Jesus, and still looking great?

That's what I'm trying to do. And the truth is, we can't make Jesus look great, and still look great, ourselves. We need to get out of the way, I need to point people to him, even if it makes me look, foolish, and small, so that he gets the glory, he's exalted, and people turn to him.

Let's pray together. Gracious God, and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your immense grace, in sending the eternal word, into our world, that we might have life, in his name.

Strengthen our faith, we pray, through the testimony, we read in John, and in the power of your spirit, in our hearts. And Father, we pray, that like John, you would enable us, to be willing to decrease, that Jesus would increase, to humble ourselves, and point other people, to our Savior and King, that they might enjoy, and experience the life, that you offer in him, sin taken away, by your Lamb who was slain.

We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.