

## The Testimony of John

If you would like to follow along I will be reading this morning from the first chapter of the *Gospel of John* beginning with verse 19 and concluding with verse 34. John writes,

**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! 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."**  
(John 1:19-34 [NKJ])

What a remarkable time in which to live that must have been! Here we have the two greatest prophets of God that ever walked upon the Earth. In John you have the last of God's prophets pointing towards Christ, and in Jesus you have the One Who was the fulfillment of the Law of Moses, the One in Whose blood the New Covenant was to be established.

You need to decide whether you are going to listen to John the Baptist's testimony in this message, for he has much to say. Here is what is at stake. In

John 1:33 (NKJ) John said, ***“I did not know Him, but He Who sent me (meaning God) 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.’”*** John the Baptist is telling us, “My testimony about Jesus does not come from what I know about Him naturally. It comes from God. God told me what to say about Jesus.”

You do not have to believe that, of course. But if you are wrong, you may miss the way of truth and life entirely. I appeal to you to make your judgment on the basis of understanding and not ignorance. There is a lot at stake for you. God has you here for a reason. You can know if John is telling the truth. But in order to know, you need to listen to what he has to say. That is what we will be talking about this morning.

John the Baptist appears at the beginning of John’s Gospel (and the other Gospels) and then falls to the background because he is a link or a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He is prominent at the beginning of the Gospel because he is part of the roots of the Gospel. The roots of Jesus go back into eternity itself (John 1:1), and John’s roots go back to the Old Testament. John is like one of those great tree roots that protrudes above the ground a few feet out from the trunk of the tree.

Over and over we will see in this Gospel that John the writer explains Jesus in terms of the Old Testament. Jesus did not appear on the scene of history without historical preparation. God had been at work in Israel for two thousand years, and even before that, putting in place a historical backdrop that would make Jesus’ life and ministry more intelligible.

John the Baptist is a root partly under ground in the Old Testament and partly exposed in the New Testament. He has a foot in both worlds – a prophet something like Elijah (but not Elijah reincarnate, 1:21) and a voice crying that the long-expected Messiah had come.

One of the purposes of John the Baptist’s ministry was to make sure he was not confused with being Jesus the long-awaited Jewish Messiah – and to make sure that Jesus was seen as utterly amazing. John got a running start in verses 6-8 and verse 15, but now in verses 19 and following, he launches with three amazing testimonies that we will look at today.

He says, first, in verse 23, ***“I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the Prophet Isaiah said.”*** John was quoting from Isaiah 40:3-5 [NKJ].

***3. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; the crooked places***

***shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth; 5. the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.***”

In other words, in Isaiah “***the Lord***” refers to Yahweh, Jehovah, the God Who is the Creator and Ruler of the world, and the Covenant God of Israel. Now here is John the Baptist saying that he is that voice crying in the wilderness, and the Lord Whose way he is preparing is Jesus Christ. That is his first witness in these verses. The Man coming after me is more than anyone ever dreamed. He is the God of the Old Testament – only now He is Man as well as God.

The second amazing testimony John makes is when they ask John the Baptist why he is baptizing, he answers in verses 26-27, ***26. “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.”***

When John is asked why he is baptizing he answers simply by saying the One I am preparing for is so superior to me that I am not worthy to untie His sandals. So John’s second witness is: *My baptizing is not about me. It is about Jesus, and He is infinitely superior to me.*

Third, in verses 29-30, John the Baptist says the main thing about why Jesus, the Lord of glory, has come to Earth. ***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.’”***

Verse 30 repeats verse 15: ***“This is he of Whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man Who is before me, for He was before me.’”*** The point is that John is emphasizing Jesus’ rank. Jesus is absolutely before John. Jesus is from eternity, He is everlasting God, and that is why the author of this Gospel begins his account of Jesus by saying in John 1:1 [NKJ], ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”***

And the reason for saying it here is that John wants to underline what it takes for Jesus to be ***“the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!”***

You see, no ordinary human being can be ***“the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.”*** Everything John has told us is essential to Jesus being the sin-removing Lamb of God. Jesus is the Lord God of Isaiah 40. Jesus is so infinitely superior to John that John is not even worthy to untie His sandals. Jesus is absolutely before John and therefore ranks infinitely above him. And because of all this, Jesus can be ***“the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.”***

So verse 29 is the highpoint of John's testimony: **"Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!"** John will repeat it in verses 35–36: **35. Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. 36. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"** This testimony caused two disciples of John the Baptist to leave him and become followers of Jesus. That is what John's witness is supposed to do. That is why he is saying, **"Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world."** He wants people to leave him and follow the Lamb (see Revelation 14:4).

So the emphasis in John's witness to Jesus falls on this amazing designation: **"Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world."** And all the other superlatives show what it takes for Jesus to be the Lamb of God Who can take away the sin of the world. So John warns us against thinking that any mere man can take away the sin of the world. What Jesus had to do to take away the sin of the world required that He be more than a Man. He was the Lord God of Isaiah 40. He was so great that the great John the Baptist was not worthy to untie His sandals. And He was absolutely before John in time and rank.

In other words, Jesus was able to be the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world because He was the God-man. **"The Word became flesh"** (John 1:14). And now we see the central reason why: to take away the sin of the world.

When John wrote his first letter, he put it like this in 1 John 3:5 [NKJ]: **"And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin."** The reason why the Son of God appeared – the reason the Word became flesh – was to take away sin. John is witnessing to the central reason for the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Why did John add in 1 John 3:5 [NKJ], **"And in Him there is no sin"**? Because the lambs that were offered in sacrifice to take away sin in the Old Testament had to be spotless, without blemish. Listen to what the Law of Moses demanded:

**32. "If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish. 33. Then he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill it as a sin offering at the place where they kill the burnt offering. 34. The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour all the remaining blood at the base of the altar. 35. He shall remove all its fat, as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offering. Then the priest shall burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire to the Lord. So the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him."** (Leviticus 4:32-35 [NKJ])

But every serious believer knew that the blood of animals could not really take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). That whole system was pointing forward to what would happen someday in a final sacrifice for sin. And John is saying: *It's happening*

now. God is sending His own Lamb into the world to take away sin, once and for all.

When Peter, another eyewitness, described how Christ ransomed us, this is the language he used. He said, **18. knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19. but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.** (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Jesus was holy. He was without sin. He never committed sin. Jesus asks in John 8:46 [NKJ], **“Which of you convicts Me of sin?”** The answer was, *No one has ever been able to convict Jesus of sin.* Jesus **“committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth”** (1 Peter 2:22 [NKJ]; see also Hebrews 4:15 and Romans 8:3).

And the reason Jesus was without sin is that He was God. **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”** (John 1:1 [NKJ; John 1:14 [NKJ]). Everything about Jesus in this Gospel shows how He could be **“the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.”**

So what does it mean when John said, **“Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world”**? It meant two shocking things for the Jews – and both of them are relevant for us today.

First of all, it meant that the God-man would die. And not just die, but die like a lamb dies. He would be *slaughtered*. Secondly, it meant that the whole world would benefit from this and not just the Jews. This God-Man was the Jewish Messiah (see John 1:41). But His death would take away the sin of the world, not just the sin of Israel.

Jesus was called the Lamb of God because He would die. That is why God sent Him. And that is why He came. That is why the Word became flesh. Otherwise, He could not die. And He was God’s Lamb for the world – not just a Jewish lamb for Israel.

Those two truths – death and worldwide sin-bearing – are summed up together in John 11:50-52 [NKJ]. The High Priest Caiaphas spoke prophetically like this:

**49. “You know nothing at all, 50. nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one Man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” 51. Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being High Priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52. and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.**

He would die for Jews. But not just for Jews, but for people scattered all over the world. John put it like this in his first letter: **“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”** (1 John 2:2 [NKJ]) Propitiation means that His death removes the wrath of God because it takes away sin. That is what propitiation means. The Lamb takes away sin and removes God’s wrath, not just for Jews but for Gentiles scattered among all nations (Revelation 5:9).

And we see this precious wrath-removal in John 3:36 [NKJ]: **“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”** This means that when John says, **“Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world,”** he does not mean that every person in the world is saved. He means every person in the world – Jew or Gentile – will be saved **if** they believe in Jesus and follow Him obediently. If they believe and obey, their sin has been taken away by the Lamb. If they believe and obey, God’s wrath has been removed by the Lamb.

There is no race, no nationality, no ethnicity, no socio-economic status excluded whatsoever. To as many as receive Him, who believe on His name (John 1:12), their sins are taken away (John 1:29; 1 John 3:5;), the wrath of God is removed (John 3:36; 1 John 2:2) and they are made the children of God (John 1:12) and given eternal life (John 3:16).

Everyone in this room who has come of age is a sinner deserving of God’s wrath. There is only one way to have your sins taken away and find favor with God. That is to give of yourself obediently to Him. Not cleaning up your life first. That comes later. That is fruit, not root. The one way is believing in Jesus as the glorious Lamb of God and having your sins washed away in the watery grave of baptism (Romans 6:1-4). Jesus said in John 8:24 [NKJ], **“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”**

Therefore, believe in Jesus as your Lamb and your Lord. And you will say with the apostles, **“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”** (1 John 1:7 [NKJ])