The Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World

John 1:19-34

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The time we spent in the prologue speaks to the theological deep waters that John jumps into in verses 1-18. Matthew, Mark and Luke have written their gospels. John is nearing the end of his life and has had time to consume all that has happened in his lifetime, he has had time to read the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Peter, James and Paul's letters to the church, he has time to reflect on the birth of the church following the resurrection and great commission to go and make disciples. He now gets to write his version. He gets to testify to and to emphasize the events in the life of Jesus that he believes will cause you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you will have life in his name.

The first 18 verses are described by scholars as "high Christology," presenting Jesus in the highest terms of divine identity and status. John 1:1–18 is not merely an introduction. It gives us a framework for everything that follows: Jesus' identity, his relationship with the Father, his rejection by the world, his glory, and his mission of salvation. John concludes his prologue with a profound statement. Verse 18 says, No one has ever seen God, but because we know Jesus, He has made the Father known to us.

Do you know the term Dayenu? You may have seen it practiced in The Chosen. It would go like this. If we had only retained the Prologue and never got to read the rest of John's letter, Dayenu! It would have been enough! What a fantastic piece of deep theological literature.

John briefly introduced John the Baptist in verses 6-8 and now, following the prologue, John picks up his narrative with John the Baptist in verses 19-51.

After introducing Jesus as the pre-existing creator and Word, John, the author, introduces John the Baptist. **Why was it important for John to begin with the story of John the Baptist?**

- John the Baptist was sent as a witness to bear witness. Recognized as a prophet, John establishes the credibility of Jesus through his testimony.
- John identifies himself by quoting Isaiah 40:3, " I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. He is preparing the way for the Messiah.
- John bears witness of the Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus.
- John bears witness of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Before we begin, let me give you a little background and the setting for John's narrative of John the Baptist and the days preceding the wedding at Cana.

- The narrative covers 4 days.
    - Day 1, John answers the questions from the priests and Levites. Who are you? And Why are you doing what you are doing?
    - Day 2, John testifies to the Spirit coming down on Jesus.
    - Day 3, The disciples of John the Baptist become followers and disciples of Jesus. Specifically, Andrew and he recruits his brother, Simon – Peter.
    - Day 4, Jesus goes to Galilee and calls Phillip and Nathaniel as disciples. He is shown to be the fulfillment of OT expectation and tells them because of their faith will see greater things than these.

John is preaching to the people to repent of their sins and to be baptized in the waters of the Jordan.

- The Jordan river originates at the base of Mount Hermon on the border of Syria and Lebanon, travels south through northern Israel, flows into and out of the Sea of Galilee, and finally empties into the Dead Sea.

Why was John the Baptist teaching his message of repentance at the Jordan River?

- The place along the Jordan where John was teaching at the beginning of his ministry was just north of the dead sea in the same exact place where Joshua crossed into the promised land with the Israelites.
- What did the Jordan river represent?
    - The location, the exact place where Joshua led the Israelites from exile into the promised land, this place is where John the Baptist chose to call people to a new exodus. To leave your sins, to repent and turn to God in preparation for the promised Messiah.
    - It was the place where Joshua's conquest began. It was a high point in the history of the Israelites. It was a time where the Israelites were winning. They were on a roll.
    - Don't we all want to return to a place in time where God was doing great things. A good friend encouraged me to visit the places where God visited you. To remember the faithfulness of God in our past so that we have renewed hope in His faithfulness in our future.
- This place is about 25 miles from Jerusalem. To drive from Jerusalem to this point today would take about 40 minutes. This was a long way from Jerusalem yet in Matthew's account of John the Baptist he tells us:

  Matthew 3:5-6 [5] Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, [6] and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

- Today we might call this a movement. I don't know that they had revivals, but this would be a movement of the Spirit drawing people to a "new exodus." To symbolically return to that place for a new start. To repent and prepare their hearts for the promised Messiah.
- John was created, he was born to preach a message of repentance and baptism by water to prepare the way of the Lord. All of Jerusalem, Judea and the entire region had heard about him and were traveling a long distance to hear him, to confess their sins and to be baptized.

Today we will cover the first two days of this account of John. Day one, where John answers the question, "Who are you?" and "Why are you doing what you are doing?" in verses 19-28 and the second day where John identifies Jesus as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" in verses 29-34.

> **John 1:19-28** And 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** So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" **23** He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." **24** (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) **25** They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" **26** John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, **27** even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." **28** These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Verse 19 – "The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem." The leaders of the Jewish people, the priests represented the Sanhedrin, the governing body made up of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Levites were the priests that were responsible for maintaining the temple worship. These were not the leaders but delegates sent by the leaders.

They asked, "Who are you?"

During this time where were many false prophets who claimed to be the Messiah. John anticipates that they would have thought that he, like others, would claim to be the Christ. So in verse 20, anticipating that they were questioning if he claimed to be the Christ, he leaves no doubt or confusion about his identity saying, "**I am not the Christ."**

Verse 21 says – "What then, are you Elijah?" Why would they ask if he was Elijah?

- The Old Testament closes with the book of Malachi. And some of the last instructions in the Old Testament is the prophet Malachi telling of God sending Elijah before the returning of the Messiah. So, the priests and Levites were referencing:

  Malachi 4:5-6 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. **6** And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

- It was a common perception that Elijah would return, and we see it in Matthew's story of the transfiguration in chapter 17 where Jesus was telling Peter and James not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.

  Matthew 17:10 And the disciples asked him, "then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come."

Jesus answers and says,

> **Matthew 17:12** "But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

- John had already been executed at this time.
- They did not know if it was to be Elijah, the actual person, coming from heaven or if someone would come in the "spirit" or power of Elijah. **Luke 1:17** makes this connection explicit. Before the birth of John the Baptist, the angel Gabriel told his father Zechariah:

  Luke 1:16-17 And 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."

- So, when the delegates of the priests and Levites asked, “What then, are you Elijah?” John answers, “I am not.”
- They go on to ask, “Are you the Prophet?”
- There were three possibilities from Old Testament Scripture that the delegates of the Pharisees thought someone like John could fulfill. First, is he the Christ? Second, is He Elijah? Or, could he be a third expectation that God would raise up a Prophet like Moses who would speak God’s words and lead the people. God promised that He would speak to them through the Prophets, but there was an expectation that there would be one Prophet who would connect to the promised Messiah. The Scripture these delegates were referencing was Deuteronomy 18:15-18

  Deuteronomy 18:15-18 “The Lord your **God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you**, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— **16** just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ **17** And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. **18** **I will raise up for them a prophet like you** from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

- “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”

  John 1:22 So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

- John now gets to declare his identity. He takes their question and answers them with laser-like focus on his mission. Remember his mission given earlier.

  John 1:6-8 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. **8** He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

- John the Baptists mission is to **bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.** So he answers them quoting Isaiah 40:3.

  John 1:23 He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

- In ancient times, when a king would come to a town, they would prepare the road or the way for him to come.
- In Isaiah 40:3, the prophet Isaiah heralds the return of Yahweh the King to Zion/ Jerusalem following their exile to Babylon.
- Here, the prophet John the Baptist, is the one preparing the way for Yahweh’s return to Zion/Jerusalem in the person of Jesus.
- John is saying, **Yahweh is coming!** And I am preparing the way for His return.
- John’s answer to their question, “What do you say about yourself?” would be clearly understood by the delegates from Jerusalem. So, they would move to the next question.

  John 1:24-25 (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) **25** They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

- They again reinforce the line of questioning, so you are not the Christ, you are not Elijah and you are not the Prophet anticipated like Moses. So, why are you baptizing?

  John 1:26-27 John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, **27** even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”

- John’s water baptism symbolized an act of cleansing. It was an act that demonstrated repentance and anticipation of the Messiah.
- But already in their midst Jesus had come. John elevates Jesus and humbles himself saying he is unworthy to do even the lowest chore of a household slave – that is to loosen the strap on Jesus’ sandals.
- As it said in verse 10, the True Light was in their midst, the Light that created the world, but the world did not know Him.

John 1:28 These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

- The exact place where Joshua led the Israelites from exile to cross the Jordan to the promised land. This is the place where John the Baptist chose to call people to a new exodus. To turn from their sins, to repent and turn to God in preparation for something much greater than the promised land, but the promised Messiah.

The next day.

John 1:29-34 The next day he 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 ranks before me, because he was before me.' [31] I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." [32] And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. [33] I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' [34] And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

- The next day when John sees Jesus coming and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
- What was John thinking when he saw Jesus, the moment he saw Jesus the picture that came to his mind was, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
- John knew the Scriptures. John was created and born for the purpose to prepare the way for the king and the King had come!
- John declares Jesus as "the lamb of God." He calls their attention to Isaiah 53 where Isaiah describes a new Passover Lamb who will redeem God's people. John declares, Jesus is that lamb.
- Many years ago we were in a bible study class at Second with JoBeth Young and Johnny Baker. A few of us started a bible study on Friday mornings. We still meet today. Many of you may know Stewart Morris

and he invited one of his Jewish friends, David Lavine. I don't know if you can be more Jewish than David. David's granddaughter lived in Minnesota and she became a Christian. David, somewhat distressed, looked at the church website and was taken. He formed a curiosity and was asking questions to some of his Christian friends and Stewart Morris invited him to attend our Bible Study. He had attended for some time and in 2014 we were studying Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 describes Jesus as the new Passover Lamb and in detail describes the crucifixion of Christ. At the end of the study, Scott Works asked the question. Do you believe that Jesus was the new Passover Lamb and do you believe Jesus was the Messiah? David spoke up and said, "Scott the answer is Yes and Yes!" It was in reading Isaiah 53 that the light went off in David's heart.

- John announces to those present that Jesus is the new Passover Lamb written about by Isaiah, the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Not just Israel's sin, but the sin of the whole world.
- In verse 30, John identifies Jesus as the one he referred to earlier in verse 15 as a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. While John was born before Jesus, John identifies Jesus as the Word who pre-existed with God at the beginning when He made all things that were made.
- John always makes more of Jesus. Jesus is SO much greater than me.
- In verse 31 John says, "I myself did not know him."
    - In verse 10 John says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet **the world** did not know Him."
    - In verse 11 he says, His own people, the Jews, did not know Him and now John says that he himself did not know him.

John 1:12-13 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God, **Verse 13** [13] who were <u>born</u>, not of blood (bloodline or ancestry) nor of the will of the flesh (self-determined will), nor of the will of man (by decree or appointment), but <u>of God</u>.

The only people who know Jesus are those to whom God makes Him known.

- John did not know Him, but he tells us in these last two verses how he came to know Jesus.

  John 1:32-34 And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. **33** I myself did not know him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ **34** And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

- John bore witness to what he saw. He repeats what he said in verse 31 saying, “I myself did not know him.” But “He who sent me.”
  - It was God who sent John to prepare the way for the king and
  - it was God who instructed John to baptize with water, and
  - it was God who said, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’
- John came to know Jesus. Instantly, the Spirit opened his heart to know the fullness of who Jesus was, and at the sight of Jesus, caused him to proclaim, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”
- There is a difference between John’s water baptism and the baptism with the Holy Spirit that Jesus offers.
- John’s water baptism was an OUTWARD calling for repentance and turning to God and a calling to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Messiah.
- Jesus’ baptism with the Spirit is much greater than the call to repentance. Jesus baptism with the Spirit is an INWARD calling offering the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit brings the very presence of God to dwell within those that know Him.
- Jesus’ baptism provides the Spirit and transforms us fulfilling the old Testament promises of **Ezekiel 36:26-27** **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of

stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. And **Joel 2:28** "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.

Jesus tells the Pharisee Nicodemus, "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus, says how can a man be born when his is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? **John 3:5** Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

- Following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven the New Covenant was inaugurated at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon those who believed. To those who **knew Him**.
- We believe Scripture supports that at the moment one receives Jesus, believes in His name, He gives the right to become Children of God and seals us with the Holy Spirit.

  Ephesians 1:13-14 In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were **sealed** with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.

- Paul tells us if we don't have the Spirit, we are not His. Speaking to believers, Paul says:

  Romans 8:9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.

- Christians practice water baptism to identify the believer with Christ. We received the Holy Spirit at the moment we came to genuine faith in Christ and subsequently, we proclaim in our public baptism our belief in His death, His burial, and His resurrection. We follow Paul's description of baptism.

Romans 6:3-4 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (We have died to the old self) [4] We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

- We join all other Christians throughout history as one.

  Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- Now let me be clear. There is also an important distinction between receiving the Holy Spirit and being continually filled with the Holy Spirit. Upon salvation we receive the Spirit, but that is not to say that we will not grow in the Spirit. Paul commands Christians in **Ephesians 5:18** to "be filled with the Spirit." Even though every believer has received the Spirit, Christians are continually called to yield to His influence, to walk in obedience, and to experience His empowering presence.

1 Corinthians 12:31 tells us to “earnestly desire the greater gifts.” The variety of gifts given by the Spirit including wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing spirits, tongues and interpreting tongues.

- The Spirit distributes to each person as He wills and this may occur over time as we mature in our faith.
- We will conclude our study in verse 34 where John says, I have seen what I was told I would see so I can bear witness that **this is the Son of God**.

What can we learn from the first day of the narrative of John the Baptist?

- Was John the Christ? No. Elijah? No (but he was a type of Elijah and they did not recognize him) Was John a Moses like prophet? No.
- John called the Israelites back to visit the place where God visited them. John was calling them to a new exodus. To turn from their sin and prepare themselves for the promised Messiah.
- We can join with John today and prepare our hearts for the coming of the King. Yahweh has come and He is coming again. Let us prepare our hearts for the coming of the King!

What do we learn about John's revelation that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world?

- The only people who know Jesus are those to whom God makes Him known.
- Jesus is the promised Messiah who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, bringing the forgiveness of sin, and new life that John's baptism anticipated.
- Ever since Pentecost, at the moment one receives Jesus, believes in His name, He gives the right to become Children of God and seals us with the Holy Spirit.
- Christians also practice water baptism to publicly proclaim our faith and identify with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.
- John says, I have seen what I was told I would see so I can bear witness that **this is the Son of God**.