

Behold, the Lamb of God

In our previous studies, we have seen how the Apostle John introduces Jesus Christ in a magisterial fashion through his beautiful prologue (vv. 1-18). We saw in our last study that John the Baptist then introduces himself as one who is not the Christ, but merely a voice in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord. Today in our text we observe a second introduction of Jesus, this time by John the Baptist, which adds tremendously to what has already been revealed in the prologue.

John 1:29-34

29 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.”

What do you see when you look at Jesus Christ? The answer is that we often see perfected images of what we ourselves wish we were. Stephen Prothero, in his book *American Jesus* some years ago, demonstrated how Americans have morphed Jesus into various images that suited our purposes. The only way in which we can see Jesus as He really is is to imitate some things from John the Baptist: 1) his humility, demonstrated in verse 27; and 2) his willingness to learn Jesus by revelation. In fact, we see that John the Baptist knows Jesus, not ultimately because John the Baptist pursues Him, but rather because Jesus pursues John the Baptist: “The next day he (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him...” (vs. 29). John the Baptist, then, gives us his testimony about Jesus and reveals three key truths that we must know and believe and enjoy about Him.

I. Jesus takes our sin away (vv. 29-31)

The world’s biggest problem is not global warming or the Ebola crisis or the ISIS crisis. The world’s biggest problem is sin. Let’s see how the Westminster Shorter Catechism defines this problem: “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God” (question 14). Let’s notice what kinds of problems this sin causes. Once again, let’s look at the Westminster Shorter Catechism (questions 17-19).

Q: Into what estate did the fall bring Mankind?

A: The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

Q: Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

A: The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.

Q: What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?

A: All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.

Nothing in any religion in the world can remove this sin from us except from one — the Lord Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist sees him he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” How does Jesus do this? The answer is by substitutionary atonement (Cf: Galatians

3:13-14; Romans 3:21-26; II Corinthians 5:21). This idea of substitution is also found throughout John's gospel.

But even with this mighty work of the Lamb of God in laying down His life for our sins, given our stubborn and rebellious hearts, how in the world will we believe and receive this great gift? The answer is that God Himself provides for us.

II. Jesus baptizes us with His Spirit (vv. 32-33)

In most religions you must turn over a new leaf. Only in Christianity is this leaf turned over for you! We receive a new life and a new heart by the baptism and indwelling of God's Spirit. John the Apostle speaks much of the Spirit's work in his gospel (Cf: Chapters 3, 7, 16, for example). Jesus, who is full of the Spirit beyond measure (Cf: Isaiah 61:1 and following; Acts 10:38), sends His Spirit to rest upon us that we might have life.

III. Jesus rules over us as God's Son (vs. 34)

During the early days of Israel's settlement into a new land, it is said of them at one point, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." When we do not have a king, a sovereign ruler, we create chaos. We can clearly see this in our daily newspapers. But God promised that He would send us a true King who would rule in righteousness forever. In Psalm 2, the Father says to the Son, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (vs. 8). And He bids all the kings of the earth to be wise by serving the Lord with fear lest His wrath be quickly kindled (vv. 10-12). This is our Lord Jesus Christ, who rules over us benevolently, providing for us, protecting us, and empowering us to walk with Him.

John the Baptist says that he has seen and bears witness to this Jesus Christ. What do you see when you look at Jesus?

Discussion Questions

1. What cultural influences tend to shape our view of who Jesus really is? How can we get beyond a merely culture-based view of Him?
2. Why is sin so sinful? Why does God respond to sin so severely?
3. How does Jesus, as the Lamb of God, take the sin of the world away? Why can it be done in no other way?

4. Why is Jesus' role as the Baptizer in the Spirit crucial to our salvation? What does the Holy Spirit do for us?

5. What does it mean to us for Jesus to be the "Son of God?"

Going Deeper

1. What is it about Jesus that you find the most difficult to embrace?

2. How can you humble yourself more effectively and open yourself more widely to the revealed description of Jesus Christ?