

Behold the Lamb – John 1:19-34
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Forty long days had passed since that life-changing moment when God had finally and unmistakably revealed the One to whom his whole life and ministry had been pointing. With a voice from heaven and a snow-white dove descending and remaining upon Jesus of Nazareth, John finally knew without a doubt the true identity of the Savior who had first been promised more than 2,000 years earlier. And wonder of wonders, it was someone he had known all his life...his own relative, in fact. God works in mysterious ways! If you can imagine the exhilaration an Olympic athlete feels after performing their best and finally receiving that gold medal they've been pursuing with all their energy and effort, you might get a small glimpse of what John must have felt at that moment...only this was something so much more significant than just a gold medal you can hold in your hands or wear around in your neck. This was the one living, human being who would carry out God's perfect rescue plan for the human race, and John had been there to witness his unveiling.

But after that exhilarating moment and whatever conversation John had with Jesus after his baptism, Jesus had simply disappeared. Life moved on as usual. John continued to baptize people as they confessed their sins; he continued to prepare the way for Jesus by calling people to repentance for forgiveness of sins. He continued to do everything God had called him to do. And yet he must have wondered: *What next, God? Where did Jesus go? I thought I had finally arrived and now it seems to be business as usual. When is the rest of the world going to discover that Jesus is the One? Is he even alive still? No one has any idea where he is. Did Satan witness his unveiling and then snuff out his life? What's going on, God?*

These are the kind of thoughts we as human beings often have as we wait for God's timing, which never seems to be in line with what we expect or would like to happen. And my guess is that John was having similar thoughts and conversations with God. But if John could have seen the whole picture; if he

could have seen what was going on from God's perspective, he would have realized that though Jesus had disappeared from his view, he was most certainly in God's sovereign care. And God was not wasting time, but was accomplishing something essential that could only be accomplished with time.

While John waited for 40 days with no further sign of Jesus, God was subjecting Jesus, in the wilderness, with no food, to every temptation the devil could come up with, so that through dependence on the Holy Spirit and trust in the Word of God, Jesus could prove himself faithful and sinless and demonstrate the perfect obedience to God the Father that would qualify him to do the job he had come to do. Though it may have seemed to John that time was wasting...though he may have struggled to understand what God was doing...though he may have wondered in his humanness if God's plan had gotten off track...nothing could have been further from the truth.

Well, as John waited patiently during those 40 long days and as he kept moving forward with trust in God and obedience to God's call on his life, a delegation of priests and Levites, sent by the Pharisees, arrived to ask him some questions. And this is where we'll pick up our study of the gospels today. Turn with me in your Bibles to John chapter 1, verses 19 through 34.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT ME (Vs. 19 to 28)

Let's begin by reading verses 19 through 28, a section I've labeled in your sermon notes: *This Is Not About Me*. Beginning in verse 19:

19 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.

Who in the world are you? What do you say about yourself? These are some pretty intense questions. The Pharisees – who by the way John had already severely ticked off by labeling them a brood of vipers and telling them to bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance – these Pharisees wanted an answer about John’s true identity. They wanted to know what authority he had to challenge their authority and to question their teachings and practices. And if we think about ourselves in John’s situation here, wouldn’t we have a pretty strong desire to justify ourselves and prove to them that we really are somebody? But what we see here in John’s response to the Pharisees is a complete lack of concern with impressing them or justifying himself in their eyes. *Are you the Christ? Are you Elijah? Are you the Prophet?* No, no and no. Anything else? *Well, who in the world are you then?* I thought you’d never ask: ***“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”***

We see here that John knew and was completely comfortable and content in the identity and role God had given him, and was completely unconcerned with whether or not the religious leaders approved of him or thought he was important. The Spirit seems to have only revealed to John at this point enough for him to know that he was the messenger spoken of in Malachi who would prepare the way for the Lord by calling people to repentance of sin. And that’s just what he was doing. Whether or not the religious recognized or approved him as that messenger was a moot point to him. God had made it clear that that’s who he was and getting human approval for his identity was not even on the radar.

It’s quite interesting to me that John didn’t realize that he was fulfilling the prophesied role of Elijah as well. We know now that he actually was the Elijah that was to come, because Jesus said so in Matthew 11:14. And yet John was not aware of that fact. Though John was an extremely godly man, walking fully in God’s purposes, that didn’t mean he had complete knowledge of who he was and who the Christ was or that he fully understood the complete meaning of every Scripture and prophecy. In other words, John was dependent on the Spirit just

like us and had to seek and wait for the Spirit to reveal what he needed to know when the time was right.

God's design is that we remain dependent on the Spirit at all times and trust him to give us what we need **as we go**. Both John and Jesus lived their lives this way. While we would love to have all the answers and understand perfectly ahead of time everything God is doing and what he's calling us to do, God doesn't work that way. Instead God wants relationship. He wants us to learn to walk with him and trust him and rely on him to give us what we need **as we go**, rather than having it all laid out for us ahead of time. Then we wouldn't need to seek and talk to him continually, would we? This same truth is displayed in the fact that though John must have known Jesus already (since they were close relatives), he had not identified Jesus as the Messiah, but had to wait for the Spirit to reveal his true identity through baptism and the Spirit descending like a dove.

Well, as you might imagine, the representatives from the Pharisees were not impressed with John's answer about his true identity. They were looking for one of three people, and if he wasn't the Christ, the Prophet, or Elijah, then what authority did he have to call into question their character and perform baptisms for forgiveness of sins as if he was an appointed religious leader? In responding to them, John continued to be unconcerned about justifying himself and what God had called him to do. He simply said, ***"I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."***

In John's response I hear him saying something like this: *Hey, are you guys familiar at all with the Scriptures...with that passage I quoted from Isaiah about my role as messenger? Well, you might want to look it up. Because the real focus of that passage is not on the messenger himself. What you'll find is that the messenger is simply preparing the way for someone much greater. His message is not about himself, but about someone else who's coming...someone who's called the Lord. And guess what? That Someone is here on earth right now. And, by the way, I've met him and I know his name. So you might want to stop focusing on me and get busy looking for Him! This is not about me!*

THIS IS ALL ABOUT THE LAMB (Vs. 29 to 34)

Well, the priests and Levites must have left at that point and returned to the Pharisees to share John's very unsatisfying answers. But for John, his 40 days of waiting to see what God was going to do next with Jesus was about to come to an end. Let's read what happened next in verses 29 to 34, which I've labeled in your notes: *This Is All About the Lamb.*

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."

After 40 days of waiting and wondering, John finally saw Jesus coming to him again, and he wasted no time telling his disciples that Jesus is the One we've been looking for! This is it! I've been telling you over and over again that he's coming, and I'm telling you now that he's here. The entire purpose of John's ministry of baptism had been to reveal this one person, Jesus of Nazareth, to Israel. And he didn't beat around the bush when telling his disciples about Jesus' true identity and how he knew he was the One. And in what he told his disciples about Jesus in these verses, they without a doubt concluded that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. In our message next week, we'll see how one of John's disciples, Andrew, had come to that exact conclusion from what John said here and wanted to spread the news.

Well, it's clear in these verses that though the Spirit had not revealed to John everything about who John himself was or all the specifics of how Jesus would actually accomplish the work he had come to do, the Spirit had shared many things with John through his study of Scripture and prayer and John understood with clarity the central mission Jesus was here to accomplish: *He is the perfect Lamb to whom thousands of years of sacrificed lambs pointed, and his central*

mission on earth was to take away the sin of the world! “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” The Son of God, fully man and fully God, had come to be the perfect Lamb who would be sacrificed once and for all accomplish what no one else could ever do: deal with sin and its wages once and for all! Jesus would take the huge garbage pile of sin and haul it off forever.

APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Do you have any sin you’re hanging on to today and that you just can’t seem to shake or leave behind? Do you have any shame for something you’ve done or someone else has done to you that just seems to linger and hold you down and keep you stuck? Do you feel weak and worried and anxious about the dark world we live in and the terrible things that happen all around us? Guilt, shame and fear...these are the universal effects of sin, and we’re all affected by them in varying degrees. Well, I have good news for you today. Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, is alive and well today and what John the Baptist foresaw in these verses, Jesus accomplished with power through his life of perfect obedience, his death on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, and his resurrection conquer death and disarm the devil. And when we come into relationship with him through simple repentance of sin and trust in his work on the cross, he takes away our sin forever and moves us from guilt to innocence, from shame to honor, and from fear to power. That’s the transformation that only the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring about.

For most of you here who have already taken that simple step of owning up to your sin, believing in Jesus Christ’s death on the cross for your sins and resurrection from the dead, and inviting him to be your Savior and Lord, this is where God intends you to live...forgiven and freed from slavery to sin...confident in your new shame-free identity as God’s child, holy and dearly loved...and filled up with the power of God’s Holy Spirit dwelling inside you.

Are you still stuck in sin? Repent. Repent whenever it crops up and enjoy God’s mercy. You have it because of Christ and what he’s done for you. Make a plan with God for changing those sin patterns and avoiding the situations that draw you into it. Learn to find you joy and delight in him instead of sin, and little by little sin will lose its appeal. You won’t want anything to hinder your sweet fellowship with God. If you fall again, repent again and enjoy God’s mercy. Make

a new plan for change by the power of the Spirit. Keep pressing on. Keep praying. Keep studying God Word and believing it. Keep asking for mercy and for God to change you. He will do it over time as you keep seeking him and pressing on and refusing to give up.

Are you stuck in shame today? Do feel like you don't measure up? Is something in your past or present keeping you ashamed? Do you feel unloved or unloveable? I have news for you: In Christ, God views you personally as an incredible and valuable inheritance he gets to receive! Check out Ephesians 1:18. Read all of chapters 1 and 2 while you're at it! God designed you, he knows you inside and out, He delights in you, He's adopted you as his forever child, and he wants to use you, filled up with the power of his Spirit, to accomplish his will in a way that no one else can. God never intends his children to remain in shame and dishonor. He calls us out of shame to live in our new identity: honored and valued by the God the universe, no matter what any other human being tells us. John showed us beautifully what that looks like: he was confident and at peace with his identity and calling and unconcerned about finding his identity and value through other people's approval.

Do you feel weak and anxious today? Is fear and stress ruling your life? Guess what? This is a struggle for all of us. You're in good company. But the gospel of Jesus Christ meets us in fear and worry as well. Through Christ, God has given us the greatest antidote to fear in the universe. He's given us himself. And he's not just standing next to us holding our hand or patting our back, he's actually dwelling inside of us through his Holy Spirit. Jesus has baptized all those who've trusted in him with the Holy Spirit. He's with us and in us and offering us his wisdom and power every moment of every day and night. And just as the Spirit led Jesus and John the Baptist and gave them everything they needed as they walked through life and difficult challenges and incredibly hard times, he's also there to do the same for us.

We're not alone to face life and its problems and try to figure things out with just our brainpower. The Holy Spirit is our guide and our strength and the key to conquering fear, so we can boldly be about the business of accomplishing God's purposes by his power: ***"for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."*** (2 Timothy 1:7). Learning to walk by the power and under the leadership of the Spirit is a matter of immersing ourselves in God's Word,

learning to pray continually, and exercising patient trust and endurance. It's through knowing the Word that we learn to recognize the guidance of the Spirit and choose his ways. It's through continual prayer throughout each day that we express our need for the Spirit and ask him to guide, direct and empower us as we go. It's through patient trust and endurance that we keep moving in the hard and confusing times and wait for the Spirit to give us what we need at the right time.

The power to leave behind guilt, shame and fear – that's the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. ***Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*** Let's live in these great gifts Jesus purchased for us on that terrible cross, where he showed more clearly than anywhere else, how deeply he loves us and wants us to live in relationship with him...freed from guilt, shame and fear! Let's spend some time now remembering what Christ endured for us on the cross through Communion.

If you're here today and you haven't yet had your sins taken away by Christ...if you haven't yet received his gift of salvation and freedom from guilt, shame and fear...or if you're just unsure about it...I want to ask you to spend our time of Communion today talking to God about it and considering whether or not today is the day of your salvation...the day when your sin is forgiven forever, and you move from guilt to innocence, from shame to honor, and from fear to power. It's such a simple process: *Admit your sin. Believe in Jesus death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. And receive him as your personal Savior and the One in charge of your life from here on out.*

A Prayer to Accept God's Free Gift of Salvation

God, I admit that I have sinned against You...
I turn from that sin right now...
I don't want to live my life that way anymore...
Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins...
And that you rose from the dead...
Right now, I put my trust in You alone for my salvation...
Jesus, You are my Lord and my Savior...My life is Yours...
Thank you for forgiving my sins and making me a new creation...
Thank you for giving me Your Holy Spirit and adopting me as your child...
Teach me through Your Word how to live life with You...Amen.

SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Read John 1:19-34, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it. Think through the following, writing notes and thoughts and looking up related Scriptures as needed:

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

How do you think John the Baptist developed the ability to be so confident in his value in God's eyes and the role God had given him and so unconcerned with what other people might think of him?

Do you struggle at all with being confident of your identity in Christ and your value in his eyes? Describe the struggles you've had and any ways God has helped you work through them.

Both John and Jesus were dependent on the Spirit's leadership and guidance and like us they had to seek the Spirit's wisdom and wait for him to reveal things in His timing and give them what they needed for each situation. What are some important skills and attitudes God needs to develop in us if we want to learn to walk by the Spirit like John and Jesus did? Which of these is hardest for you and why?

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John recognized that as the central mission of Jesus. Through repentance of sin and belief in the gospel, Jesus moves us from guilt to innocence, from shame to honor, and from fear to power. Which of these three (guilt, shame or fear) do you most struggle to leave behind and why? What are some Scriptures you can find that speak the truth into this area of struggle for you?

Summarize below anything God is calling you personally to believe, any actions God is asking you to take, or any attitudes He wants to change. Repent where needed and enjoy God's mercy. Then pray over these items and make a plan for change by the power of the Spirit.