

"Looking for the Messiah"
(John 1:19-42)
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¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

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.'"

²⁴ Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ 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.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

The gospel of John was written to introduce the world to the most important person in the entire universe. A person's importance is often made known by his titles. Within the verses that we just read, these are the titles that are used for this person. Christ, Messiah, Lord, Lamb-of-God, The pre-existent one, The Spirit-anointed one, The one who Baptizes with the Holy Spirit, The Son of God, Rabbi, and of course Jesus, which means savior. And in the preceding verses he was introduced as the Word (the Logos), as God, as the Creator, as the true light, and as the one and only Son. This is no ordinary person.

Today's passage continues with the ministry of John the Baptist. Now, this isn't the first time in this gospel that John the Baptist is mentioned. He was first introduced in verse 6 and 7.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. (**John 1:6–8**)

These verses tell us that John was sent from God. It also tells us what his role was. His role was to testify concerning the light, who is the Logos, who is the Jesus. And in these initial verses it already tells us that this light came into the world in order that we might believe in him. John is not the light. He came only to be a witness, to testify, you can even say, to point to the light. And that is exactly what he does.

Then when we get to verse 15, the ministry of John the Baptist is mentioned again.

(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") (**John 1:15**)

From this verse we also are told something very interesting about Jesus. He is the one who comes after John, but he has surpassed John. He is greater than John because he was before John. What is John saying? John is saying that he came on the scene first, because his job was to introduce the one who is really important, the one that has surpassed him. And the reason he is greater than John and more important than him is because the one he testified about was before him. Now, this isn't the last time that we read things like this in this gospel. For example from Jesus himself, when he was debating with the religious leaders, said, "before Abraham was, I am." So this gospel is being written to tell us about a very unusual and important person.

Now, in the passage we read today, John's ministry becomes even clearer. Part of John's ministry was to make sure there was no mistaken identity. He knows that his job was to point to Jesus, so part of his ministry was to say, I am not the Messiah.

So, the religious leaders ask him, then who are you? Are you Elijah they ask? Now why would they ask that? Wasn't Elijah a prophet that lived hundreds of years ago in time of Israel's kings? So why would they ask if he was Elijah? Elijah was a powerful prophet that lived during one of the most wicked kings of Israel, King Ahab. And when his ministry was over, he was one of a few figures who was taken up into heaven directly without experiencing a physical death. Why do they ask if he is Elijah? For that answer we have to go to the prophet Malachi.

⁵ "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction." (**Malachi 4:5–6**)

So, the Jewish people were expecting the return of Elijah and so they wondered, perhaps John the Baptist, was Elijah. John denies it and says he is not Elijah. Now a small problem may occur here. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us that John the Baptist is, in fact the Elijah, that Malachi prophesied about.

¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come." (**Matthew 11:12–14**)

But, John clearly says that he isn't Elijah. How do you reconcile this? I think the solution is very simple. John simply didn't possess the self awareness that he was the Elijah to come. I doubt if people, including John, understood whether Elijah himself, would reappear or if another person would come as a type of Elijah would come. It is unlikely that John was aware that he has that person and it isn't until Jesus makes it clear, that we know that John was the Elijah mentioned in Malachi.

Then they ask, if you're not Elijah, are you the Prophet? Who are they referring to here? Which prophet are they talking about since there were so many? Even though there were many prophets, there was only one person they would call "The Prophet." This person is mentioned to the Israelite people by Moses, right as the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. It's found in Deuteronomy 18:14-18.

¹⁴ The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. ¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a **prophet** like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." ¹⁷ The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a **prophet** like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him." (**Deuteronomy 18:14-18**)

God promises the Israelites a prophet like Moses. This prophet was understood to be some kind of end-times spokesman for God. So John answers, "No. I am not the Prophet."

The religious leaders then ask, well who are you then? John answers by quoting the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (40:3).

"I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

Isaiah is a very important prophet and chapter 40 is a very important chapter. Perhaps more than any other Old Testament book, Isaiah says the most about the coming of the Messiah, about Jesus Christ. And in chapter 40 of Isaiah, it mentions a voice, an announcer and John says, I am that person.

I can think of two examples. One is in Korean historical dramas. Whenever the king is about to enter a room, one of the king's eunuch's announces, "Here comes the king." The other example is with our neighbors to the south. For example when congress meets for when the President gives his annual state of the union address, you see a lively room, filled with all the politicians and some special guests. But then the conversation at the Capitol building begins to quiet down and then you hear someone say in a loud voice, "Mr. Speaker, the President of the United States." That was John's job. His job was to announce the coming of the Lord.

Then the Pharisees ask John. Okay then, if you are not the Messiah, and if you are not Elijah, and if you are not the Prophet, then why are you baptizing? At that time, the practice of baptism existed, but it was usually self-administered, like a self-cleansing ritual. The unusual thing about John's baptism was that he was administering it, he was the one that was baptizing others, which would have made him look like a very important person. In other words, their question of 'why are you baptizing' is asking, are you sure you're not the Messiah, or Elijah or the Prophet, you seem pretty important, who are you?

John answers the Pharisees saying, I baptize with water, but there is one among you that you do not know. And though he comes after me, I am not even worthy to untie his shoelaces. He's basically saying. I'm a nobody. But there is someone really important that's coming and has now come.

That brings us to verse 28 which is a transitional verse concluding one episode and tying in the next. 1:28. This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day, we find John continuing his ministry of baptism and he sees Jesus coming toward him and says, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." So here, John does exactly what he came to do. He draws all the attention to Jesus. But of all the titles for Jesus, he uses the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. What does he mean by that? Well John tells us that this Lamb's purpose was to take away the sin of the world.

In Jesus' purpose we find our problem. Our great problem is our sin. There are a lot of problems we face in life. There are so many it's almost impossible to count. We have problems with our health. We have problems with our siblings. We have problems in our families. We have problems with school. We have money problems. We don't make enough and we spend too much. We have problems with the government. We have problems with our car not starting in these frigid temperatures. We have problems with coworkers and problems with our bosses. There are so many problems that we face on a daily basis and we give much of our attention to these problems. But all of these problems pale in comparison to the greatest problem of sin. Sin *is* our greatest problem. We must never confuse this. We must not let society tell us there is a greater problem. We must not believe some pastors and some churches that tell us that sin is not the greatest problem. Throughout the bible it is clear that they greatest issue facing humanity is the problem of sin. You fix that problem and everything else takes care of itself.

Now, I don't know if you noticed, but John said sin, not sins. Sin is different from sins. What we commit from day to day are sins. The problem with our lives and with the world is the problem of sin. We commit sins because of the problem of sin. The root problem is sin. The manifestation of the root problem of sin is that we commit sins. Jesus came to take away the sin of the world. He came to deal with the problem of sin. In that sense he was the Lamb of the world. He came to be the savior of all peoples. And as a lamb it begins to tell us how he was going to do that. He was going to do that by sacrificing himself. He was going to be like the lamb mentioned in Isaiah 53.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (**Isaiah 53:7**)

John the Baptist points us to him. And in a very real sense, that's our job too. As Christian people, we don't say, look at me. We don't even say look at the pastor. And every preacher's job is the same. We say, look at the Lamb. Only the lamb can take away the sin of the world.

Then we are told that John the Baptist witnessed the Spirit come down from heaven and remained on Jesus. God then tells John that this person on whom the Spirit comes and remains is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. The one that John speaks of, will baptize with a greater baptism than his own. John's baptism is with water. It is administered by a human. It is only external. And it's temporary. But the baptism that Jesus brings will be far more superior. It will be a baptism by the Holy Spirit, by God himself. It isn't merely physical, it's spiritual. It doesn't just wash the outside, it washes the inside. It cleanses the heart of a person. When a person is born again, God himself, by the Holy Spirit, enters that person, to remain with that person forever. And when the Holy Spirit enters, he gives that person a new heart, and changes them forever. This is what Jesus came to do.

The next day (v35), John is doing his baptizing thing and teaching and telling people about Jesus. Then he sees Jesus passing by and he says again, "Look the Lamb of God!"

Two disciples started doing exactly what John wanted people to do. They began to follow Jesus. This is what it means to be a Christian. Christianity asks the question, Who or what are you following? Another way to ask that question is “What are you living for?” What Christianity says is, there is only one person who is worthy of following after. There is only one person who is worthy to demand that you drop everything and follow him.

Jesus notices them following him and asks them, “What do you want?” (38) Their response is unusual. Rebecca Pippert says that they were caught off guard. They were tongue tied. They didn’t know what else to say, and the best they could come up with at the time was, “Where are you staying?” Another commentator said that it was a question that was asking, “Can we have a private moment with you to ask you some questions.”

Whichever the case, Jesus obliges and says, **come and you will see**. These two at this point in the story have only a vague idea of who Jesus is, but Jesus invites them to come and find out. That’s the point of this gospel. This invitation is for all of us, both Christian people and not yet Christian people. Jesus tells you today, “Come and you will see.” Are you willing to follow me? Are you willing to ask questions? Are you willing to open your heart and mind? Then come, and you will see. I invite you to do that.

There’s something else to learn from this passage. Andrew was the first of the two disciples to encounter Jesus and the first thing he does is to find his brother Simon, and he runs off to tell him, “We have found the Messiah.” And then he brings him to Jesus. Look at what’s happening here. John the Baptist, a great figure in his own right is introduced in this story. He is the Elijah that the Jews were waiting to appear. And his singular message is, “Look at the Lamb! Look at the Lamb! It’s not about me. It’s all about Jesus.” And then Andrew does the same. It’s not enough that Andrew himself found the Messiah, he runs off and finds his brother, “and he brought him to Jesus.” Then we see Philip, after encountering Jesus, goes after Nathanael and tells him, Come, we’ve found the one!”

This is what all of us are called to do. If you’re a Christian, it’s because someone said to you, “Look at the Lamb.” You’re a Christian because someone introduced you to Jesus. And now that you’re a Christian, you do the same. You tell your children, “I have found the Messiah!” You tell your neighbor, “Look at the Lamb!” Last year, it was a goal that each person in our church shares the gospel to at least one person. Were you able to do that? Let’s make that our goal this year and every year. This is the greatest thing you could do for a person, to introduce them to the Lamb, to Jesus, to help them find the Messiah.

Let’s pray.