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# JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

## *BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD*

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A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter  
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on January 29, 2017

### INTRODUCTION

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In American culture today, Christianity is largely perceived in one of two ways. Some see Christianity as backwards and suppressive; but others see it as casual and stylish. Both have a skewed perspective, and each demonstrates a lack of understanding regarding what Christianity is really all about. God is holy and just; He is gracious and kind. In the person and work of Christ, we may observe the fullness of God's justice and grace on simultaneous display. In this message, we shall seek to unpack the beauty, the sorrow, and the triumph of the Lamb of God.

### **JOHN 1:19-34**

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.

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."*

## THE POINT I'M AIMING AT TODAY:

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**Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God; Behold Him!**

## MESSAGE OUTLINE:

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**(1) A WALK THROUGH THE PASSAGE**

**(2) WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT CHRIST IS "THE LAMB OF GOD"**

**(3) A CALL TO "BEHOLD" THE LAMB OF GOD**

## MESSAGE

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**(1) A WALK THROUGH THE PASSAGE**

19 And **this is the testimony of John,**

John [the Gospel writer] has already given us his outline, and now he is starting back at verses 6-8 – ***"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light."***

when **the Jews** [a neutral reference to Jewish leadership<sup>1</sup>] sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, **“Who are you?”**

Understanding the context for this question:

- 1) Jews began baptizing Gentile converts into Judaism a couple of hundred years before John the Baptist, but they baptized themselves and they were not Jewish;
- 2) John the Baptist was a Levite, the son of a priest (1 Chron. 24:7-19; cf. Lk. 1:5-13);
- 3) John the Baptist did not hold the office of priest, but acted/spoke like a prophet;
- 4) John the Baptist drew widespread attention – even some 1<sup>st</sup> century secular historians wrote more of John than of Jesus]

20 He [John] confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, **“I am not the Christ.”**

This clunky statement was an emphatic denial from John. He is NOT the Christ, but he intends clearly to point to the one who IS (v29, 34).

21a And they asked him, **“What then? Are you Elijah?”** He said, **“I am not.”**

First: “Elijah” was expected because of Malachi’s prophecy concerning the coming “day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5).

Therefore, the priests and Levites were asking if he was the one they should be expecting.

Second: Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us that Jesus identified John the Baptist with the promised Elijah (Mt. 11:14; 17:12; Mk. 9:13; cf. Lk. 1:17).

What are we to do with this?

**D.A. Carson** says that John’s statement **“suggests that he did not detect as much significance in his own ministry as Jesus did.”**<sup>2</sup>

In other words, John did not see himself as important enough to be labeled in this way.

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<sup>1</sup> “Sometimes the expression is rather neutral, explaining a ritual for readers removed from Palestine (e.g. 2:6). Elsewhere the expression bears decidedly positive overtones (‘salvation is from the Jews’, 4:22; Jesus himself is a Jew, 4:9). Some Jews believe (11:45; 12:11); others, unfortunately, seem to come to faith, and then turn away again (8:30ff). In 7:1, the expression takes on geographical colouring: the people of Judea. Most commonly it refers to the Jewish leaders, especially those of Jerusalem and Judea (as here in 1:19), and usually they are cast as those who actively oppose Jesus, fail to understand him, and who finally seek his death.” Carson, D. A. (1991). The Gospel according to John (pp. 141–142). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>2</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). The Gospel according to John (p. 143). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

**Sproul** says that it is better to understand that the question is more literal, and that is why John answered in the negative.

In other words, because of some Jewish myths that had formed since Malachi's prophecy, some Jews believed that Elijah himself would be reincarnated.

Therefore, the priests and Levites were asking if John was literally the reincarnation of Elijah.

In my view, either one of these explanations is sufficient to harmonize the Scriptural account, but I lean towards the second.

21b ***“Are you the Prophet?”*** And he answered, ***“No.”***

God had promised that a “Prophet” would arise “like Moses” (Deut. 18:15-18).

Some Jews believed this would be one who prophesy immediately before the arrival of the End.

Samaritans associated the “Prophet” with the “Messiah” Himself.

But John certainly denied that he was “the Prophet,” even though he was “a” prophet (Matt. 11:9).

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?”***

Note the frustration of the priests and Levites: *“If you are not the Messiah/Christ, and not Elijah, and not the Prophet, then what or who are you!?”*

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.”***

John answers with a quote from Isaiah 40:3.

While John denied being “Elijah,” he did understand himself to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's and Malachi's predicted forerunner (Mal. 3:1).

Both Malachi and Isaiah speak of one who would come before “the LORD.”

The deep well of God's Word offers incredible promise to those who will hear it!

John said that he was the one God would send before He Himself would bring *peace, comfort, and pardon* (Is. 40:1-2).

24 (Now they had been sent from the **Pharisees**.)

The Pharisees were not in charge of everything, but they were a large (or at least influential) group among the Jewish leadership (Sanhedrin).

We are not wrong to think, “Crooked, legalistic oppressors...”

But the Pharisees were influential precisely because they did not appear to be “crooked” on the outside.

The average Jewish person in the 1<sup>st</sup> century would have seen the Pharisee as the epitome of righteousness and the standard for holy living.

However, because the Pharisees generally cared more about a legalistic standard, they took it upon themselves to police everything that didn’t line up.

25 They asked him, “*Then **why are you baptizing**, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?*”

This is a question of authority.

It may seem like they have ignored John’s quotation from Isaiah, but they have not.

They are asking him now, “*If you are who you claim to be, then what authority do you have to claim such a thing?*”

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.***”

John answers with an appeal to authority, but not his own.

In John’s day, a student was expected to serve his teacher as a slave would a master. The service of the teacher was to teach, and the service of the student was to learn and serve.

The student was a basically a slave in every way except for one: the student did not have to lower himself to remove his teacher’s shoes and wash his feet. Only the lowest slave would be obligated to that task.

However, John says that this lowest of menial tasks is still above him in relation to the One coming after him!

John basically says, “*you are spending far too much time looking at me, when you should be looking at the One who comes after me, for He is far greater than me.*”

28 These things took place in Bethany [an actual place during an actual time of human history] across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

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!**”

BOOM!

Up to this point, the “testimony of John” (v19) has been several **negative confessions** – “*I am not the Christ...*” (v20); “*I am not Elijah...*” (v21a); “*I am not the Prophet...*” (v21b).

Now, John makes the first positive confession, affirming that “*Jesus*” is “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*”

Some commentators claim that John the Baptist had an apocalyptic view of the “lamb” in mind, and not particularly a suffering sacrifice.<sup>3</sup>

This may be true (I see no problem with it), but we would do well to hear more than just the voice of John the Baptist behind the words of sacred Scripture... God intends all that this imagery suggests to be provoked in our minds as we read and hear this magnificent announcement.

We shall come back to this in a moment...

But, John the Baptist goes on in defense of his proclamation concerning the “Lamb of God”

30 *This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’* [He ‘already existed’ 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.”*

The indication is that John did not know who he was looking for, but he would know Him when he saw Him.

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<sup>3</sup> “When the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, he probably had in mind the apocalyptic lamb, the warrior lamb, found in some Jewish texts (1 Enoch 90:9–12; Testament of Joseph 19:8; Testament of Benjamin 3:8—the latter passages probably, but not certainly, pre-Christian) and picked up in the Apocalypse (Rev. 5:6, 12; 7:17; 13:8; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:22–23; 22:1–3)... the impression gleaned from the Synoptics is that he thought of the Messiah as one who would come in terrible judgment and clean up the sin in Israel. In this light, what John the Baptist meant by ‘who takes away the sin of the world’ may have had more to do with judgment and destruction than with expiatory sacrifice. Certainly the verb *airō* normally means ‘remove’, ‘take away’, not ‘bear away in atoning death’ or the like (for which the more common verb is *anapherō*; cf. Dodd, IFG, pp. 230–238). But this does not necessarily mean that John the Evangelist limited himself to this understanding of ‘Lamb of God’. Just as John insists that Caiaphas the high priest spoke better than he knew (11:49–52), so it is easy to suppose that the Evangelist understood the Baptist to be doing the same thing.” Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 149–150). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

32 And John bore witness: ***“I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.*** [this was the fulfillment of prophecy (Is. 11:2)]

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.’***

John’s testimony here includes the testimony of God Himself.

God said to John, *“He on whom the Spirit descends and remains is the Chosen One of God.”*

34 ***And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God*** [or ‘Chosen One of God<sup>4</sup>].”

John’s testimony is complete: ***“Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God; Behold Him!”***

## **(2) WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT CHRIST IS “THE LAMB OF GOD”**

***“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** (v29)

- Not just once...
  - John (the Gospel writer) tells us, ***“On the next day...”*** John the Baptist saw Jesus again, and again he yells, ***“Behold, the Lamb of God!”*** (v35-36).
    - John the Baptist had a couple of disciples of his own, and when they heard John’s proclamation, they left John to follow Jesus (v37).
      - We also know that they understood “the Lamb of God” to be the “Messiah” or “Christ” (v41).
        - So, there is at least some sense in which we mean that **Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, when we say He is the “Lamb of God.”**

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<sup>4</sup> “A very good case can be made for the view that the best reading here is ‘this is the Chosen One of God’ (ho eklektos instead of ho huios). Textual support for ‘Chosen One’ is significant,<sup>41</sup> even if not as strongly supported as one might wish (e.g. the two important papyri designated P66 and P75 preserve ‘the Son’). But ‘Son’ is a common designation for Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (cf. notes on 1:49; 5:16–30); ‘the Elect One’ is not elsewhere attested in this book. Copyists were therefore more likely, on balance, to change ‘the Elect One of God’ into ‘the Son of God’ than the reverse, especially since the former could be construed to support adoptionism. If so, ‘the Elect One of God’ is original, and John is probably making a direct reference to Isaiah 42:1, where God promises to pour out his Spirit on his servant, his ‘chosen one’ (LXX ho eklektos).” Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 152). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

- Not a New Metaphor/Image

- ***Abraham and Isaac***

- God told Abraham to climb Mt. Moriah with his beloved son, Isaac, at his side. The pilgrimage was planned, and the task was to lay Isaac upon an altar as a sacrifice unto God. Of course, such a task was horrifying to Abraham, but obedience was rendered. Along the way, Isaac began to understand a bit about what was happening, so he asked about the missing sacrificial offering...

- “Abraham said, ‘**God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.**’ So they went both of them together” (Genesis 22:8).

- **Christ is the substitute Lamb, provided by God!**

- ***The Passover Lamb***

- The tenth and final plague was coming to Egypt, and God told Moses how the people might be spared from enduring the judgment of God.

- God said, Get a lamb for each household (Ex. 12:3), without spot or blemish (12:5), and have every household kill their lamb and smear his blood on the doorposts of their house (12:7).
- God said, I will pass through Egypt and kill every firstborn thing there, both man and beast; I will execute My judgments (12:12). But the lamb’s blood on the doorposts will be a sign for you. I will see it and My judgment shall pass over you (12:13).

- **Christ is the Lamb, Whose blood is applied to those who believe, and this causes the judgment of God to pass over us!**

### ○ ***The Suffering Servant***

- After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Philip (the disciple of Christ and Apostle) came upon an Ethiopian official who was reading a scroll containing the writings of the prophet Isaiah. Philip began with the passage we will now consider, and told the man the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:26-38).
  - The Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53:7-8 – “7 He was ***oppressed***, and he was ***afflicted***, yet he opened not his mouth; ***like a lamb that is led to the slaughter***, and like a ***sheep that before its shearers*** is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By ***oppression*** and ***judgment*** he was ***taken away***; and as for his generation, who considered that ***he was cut off*** out of the land of the living, ***stricken for the transgression of my people?***”
  - The passage continues, “9 And they ***made his grave with the wicked*** and ***with a rich man in his death***, although he had ***done no violence***, and there was ***no deceit in his mouth***. 10 Yet ***it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief***; when ***his soul makes an offering for guilt***, he ***shall see his offspring***; he ***shall prolong his days***; the ***will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand***. 11 ***Out of the anguish*** of his soul ***he shall see and be satisfied***; by his ***knowledge shall the righteous one***, my servant, ***make many to be accounted righteous***, and ***he shall bear their iniquities***” (Isaiah 53:9-11).

**Major Point**: Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God; Behold Him!

### **(3) A CALL TO “BEHOLD” THE LAMB OF GOD**

- First, your need for the Lamb of God
  - God is holy, righteous and just... and that’s bad news.
  - You are unholy, rebellious and disobedient... every second of your life.

- Second, God's incredible grace in offering the Lamb for you
  - Which of you are deserving of this Lamb?!
  - Sheer grace has come by way of unfathomable love.
- Third, your joy in Beholding the Lamb of God
  - Your joy is not in keeping your dignity.
  - Your joy is not in checking boxes of false piety.
  - Your joy is not in achieving worldly success.
  - Your joy is not in social acceptance or approval.

**Major Point: Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God; Behold Him!**

#### SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

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*Behold the Lamb of God!* by James Smith

[http://www.gracegems.org/Smith4/behold\\_the\\_lamb\\_of\\_god.htm](http://www.gracegems.org/Smith4/behold_the_lamb_of_god.htm)

*Jesus Christ: The Lamb of God* by R.C. Sproul

<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/jesus-christ-lamb-god/>

*Behold the Lamb of God* by John Piper

<http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/behold-the-lamb-of-god>

*The Lamb of God* by Derek Thomas

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/lamb-god/>