“BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD”

Scripture: John 1:19-34.

The Apostle John wrote his account of the life of Jesus – what we know as the Gospel of John – decades after the other 3 gospels had been written. John's purpose for writing his Gospel is stated in John Chapter 20, verse 31 READ it.

Believing by faith that Jesus is the Son of God produces eternal life. It is the necessary ingredient for salvation. We will see this as a recurring theme throughout this book – Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

In the early years of the church many false doctrines were being spread about who Jesus was. The idea that Jesus was just a great moral teacher is one that is still prevalent today. John writes the Gospel of John to settle the matter once and for all that Jesus Christ is God, deity, part of the holy Trinity, veiled in human flesh…fully God and fully man. The Apostle John begins his gospel, not with Jesus' birth as Matthew and Luke did, or with Jesus' baptism as Mark chose to do. Instead John begins with a statement about Jesus that is a basic tenet of the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ is God. We looked at these last week.

Beginning in verse 19 John proceeds to make his case, to prove his claim that Jesus is God. He does this thru the testimony of eyewitnesses and by the words and deeds of Jesus Himself. The first witness he calls upon to testify about Jesus is John the Baptist.

READ John 1:19-23.

John the Baptist was a rather unique character and we talked about him last week. He was a prophet who wore clothes made out of camel's hair. He preached this message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2). People were moved by his words because he spoke the truth. John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Spirit, challenged the people to turn from their sins. He then baptized them as a symbol that they had repented and been cleansed of their sins. Mark tells us in his account that “all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” (Mark 1:5)

 At this particular point in Israel’s history it’s been 400 years since the last of their prophets, Malachi, had proclaimed God's message to His people. As a result, the people were starving to hear a word from God. And so John the Baptist certainly got the people's ear. He was so dynamic in his preaching that many of the people who heard him believed he was the Messiah. You can certainly understand the questions that were asked of him by the priests and Levites – "Who are you?"

John the Baptist quickly diffuses any of the notions that he might be the Messiah. He clearly states, "I am not the Christ" ["Christ" is a Greek translation of the Hebrew title, “Messiah,” meaning “the anointed one”]. "OK, well if you are not the Christ, then who are you? Are you Elijah, the prophet of old?" Why would they think John the Baptist might be Elijah? Because of what Malachi had prophesied: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” (Malachi 4:5) John the Baptist answered them, "I am not.” They continued on with their interrogation of him: "Are you the Prophet?" What prophet were they talking about? This is the one that Moses prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me (Moses) from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen…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 commanded him." (Deut 18:15, 18) John made it clear that he was not that prophet either.

"Well, then, who are you? Describe yourself. We have got to go back to Jerusalem and tell the leaders who sent us something about who you are." So John the Baptist tells them who he is. He says, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness... “I love the humility in John’s answer. He doesn’t claim to be a prophet, or the son of a priest or anybody of any importance or prominence. Here you have this great man of God, a man about whom Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Matt 11:11). John could have described himself a number of ways, but he refused to elevate himself. Instead, John the Baptist said, "Who am I? I'm nobody. I'm nothing. I'm just a voice. He (Jesus) is the Word. I am just the voice. I'm the voice of one standing out here in the wilderness crying, “Make straight the way of the Lord.” Get your heart ready! Prepare yourselves for the Lord. I'm the one that Isaiah prophesied about (he quotes Isaiah 40:3).

John the Baptist refused to sound his own horn. He deflected any of the attention away from himself and he pointed people to the Savior. And that is what we are supposed to be doing as we serve Him.

READ John 1:24.

Let me say something about this group of Pharisees that had sent a delegation to the wilderness to question John the Baptist. Back in verse 19 the term used to describe them is "the Jews." We will be seeing a lot of them as we go thru this study. These men represented the Jewish leaders who would oppose Jesus throughout His ministry. Well, John the Baptist tells them who he is. Now they begin to question him about what he is doing, specifically about his practice of baptism.

READ John 1:25-28.

The Jew's problem with what John the Baptist was doing was that baptism was not a part of their ceremonial law. It was not a religious practice of the Jews. Furthermore John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. They were indignant at any suggestion that they needed to repent. And the idea of a ritual cleansing in the muddy Jordan River – how repulsive! The Jews, of course, had their own rite of spiritual cleansing. It was called "purification." So they questioned John's authority to do what he was doing.

Notice John’s answer to them. He doesn’t address either their question about his authority issue nor about his baptism. Instead he goes right back to his central message of pointing people to the coming Messiah. His message is "Here He is! The Messiah is here! Don't focus your attention on me. Focus on the One who is preferred, who is pre-eminent, the Christ, the Messiah, the One you have all been waiting for. I am not even worthy to loosen the straps of His sandals!"

READ John 1:29-31

Here we see Jesus arriving onto the scene. Notice the term John uses to describe Jesus. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Why does John call Jesus the “Lamb of God?” The Jews understood the significance of this term. For centuries they had gone through the sacrificing of lambs. It was a part of their everyday life and culture. They knew all about the Passover where a lamb's blood was shed and sprinkled on the door. They knew all about every morning and every evening of every year of every decade of every century in the temple without an exception, the lamb was slain in the morning, in the evening, in the morning, in the evening, never ending...slaying of the lamb for the burnt offering for sin. They also knew that Isaiah had prophesied that there would come a lamb that would be slaughtered, and here He is, John says. "Here is the lamb of God, the final sacrifice." The writer of Hebrews affirms this: "And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.” (Heb 10:11-12)

John the Baptist's message confronted people with their need for repentance. But they needed much more than repentance. They needed redemption. No amount of water could remove the stain of their sin; that required blood; and not the blood of bulls or goats or sheep. It called for the shedding of precious blood. Redemption would be made possible by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, on the cross.

The Jews wanted a prophet, but God gave them a lamb. The Jews wanted a political king and God gave them a lamb. You see, we cannot reign with God until we are related to God. And we can't be related to God if there's sin in the way. And so God had to send a sacrifice to deal with our sin before there could be a relationship.

I think it’s interesting in verse 31 that John the Baptist says, "I myself did not know him.” John the Baptist and Jesus were first cousins. John had known Jesus at this point for about 30 years. But during all that time John had not realized that Jesus was the Messiah. This truth was not revealed to him until he had been obedient to God's calling on his life. All John the Baptist knew was that God wanted him to go out into the wilderness and to preach that the Messiah was coming, to baptize for repentance and to preach "repent for the Kingdom is at hand." And so he had been doing, faithfully and boldly.

So, when did John the Baptist realize that Jesus was the Messiah? He tells us in the next few verses. READ John 1:32-34.

God revealed it to John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God when Jesus came to him to be baptized. John the Baptist testifies that whenever he had baptized Jesus he had seen the Holy Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and remain on Jesus. He says, "Then I knew “that this is the Son of God."

How can we know that Jesus is the Son of God? The same way that John the Baptist came to know. God reveals it to us. He tells us. Do you remember the exchange between Jesus and Peter? Jesus asks Peter, "Who do men say that I am?" Peter replies, "Oh, some people think You are Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." "That's great, Peter but who do you say that I am?" Peter said, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." And Jesus looks Peter right in the eye and says, "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father." It is God who reveals to us the truth about Christ. The fact is that depraved humanity cannot understand things of God. Paul says they are “foolishness” to him. The natural man cannot receive nor understand the things of God. The only way we can ever know who Christ is by God's divine revelation, through His word and by the Holy Spirit. And so it was even with John the Baptist.

Next week we will hear the testimonies of the first of Jesus’ disciples – Peter and Andrew and Philip and Nathanael.