

John 1:19-37

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Date: 10 September 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Do be seated. Turn if you will in John 1. It's very hot isn't it? If you feel you need to get up and wander around, get a bit of fresh, well it's not particularly fresh is it? But get a glass of water. Please don't, well you don't have to faint is what I'm saying.

And we're going to meet this evening at 6 o'clock and Sinclair Ferguson is preaching. He does pulpit supply around the place. I felt we needed to have him. So, you know, I know it's a big disappointment Ruben and I aren't on, but Sinclair will be preaching tonight.

I want us to look tonight, this morning, at John 1. And I'm aware that you need to exercise great discretion when you talk about your heroes. You can be guilty, can't you, of elevating a man or a woman. You can be guilty of talking too much about a particular person.

But it's good to have heroes. We were made to have heroes. Godly heroes, wholesome heroes, well chosen heroes. And once in a while it's good to talk about them and to commend them.

There's a man among others, one man probably who's had a profound shaping life, shaping influence on my life. He's now 98. I can see him probably kind of once a month. We talk about church life, we talk about preaching and various things.

[1 : 2 6] I feel something more than respect for him. There's clearly that, but there's something more than respect. Something more than admiration. There's clearly admiration.

In as far as it's appropriate to stand in awe of a human being, that's what I feel about this old man. And the amazing thing is, as I've known him over the last 30 years, is what he's done consistently is he has said to me, Levy, stop thinking about yourself, which is a very, very good thing.

But he said to me, stop thinking about yourself and get into God's word and think about God. Don't look at me, look at God. And when I look at John 1, I think John the Apostle stands in awe of John the Baptist.

I think we can see that in the way that it's written. Still, after all these years, after all the time that's passed, in John chapter 1, 50 years later, John sits down to write his gospel.

And in all those ensuing years, John knew sense, as he writes about this guy, John the Baptist, he knew, he stands in awe of him. It's very likely, I think, that John, the Apostle who wrote the gospel, was one of John the Baptist's followers, disciples.

[2 : 4 8] It's very likely that he is one of the two mentioned in verse 35. John stands in awe of this man. He's seen his strange appearance.

He's experienced his authority. He's felt the weight of God's voice in this man. And so his awe for John the Baptist, you can still sense it.

And it grows out of his first-hand experience of John the Baptist. First, nothing could deter this man from his purpose.

John the Baptist already told us, isn't he, last week, John the Apostle has told us what John the Baptist's role is. Look at verse 6. Back in verse 6, he says, There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to the light, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He wasn't the light, but he came to bear witness to the light.

[3 : 5 0] Do you hear that? There was a man called John who was sent from God. And his purpose was to call witness, to bear witness to someone else, to call attention to someone else, to point people's eyes and hearts to someone else.

And again, you see it in verse 15. Have a look there. John bore witness about him and cried out, This was he of whom I said, he who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me.

So listen up for a moment. John's purpose in writing about John's Baptist ministry can be summarized in three words. So when you start off as a preacher, they say, put your sermon into

one sentence.

All good sermons are put into one sentence. Great sermons are put into three words. All right? Amazing sermons are put into one word.

I'm speaking ironically. All right? Three words. Okay? So children, what are the three words? Do you remember? Not me, him. What are they? Not me, him.

[4 : 58] There you go. You've got the sermon. Not me, him. Now, because the sermon is so good, you can put it into one word. Him. Somebody says to you, what was the sermon about on Sunday morning?

Not me, him. Or him. That's John's life, John the Baptist. And as we look at these verses, we see all the ways in which John bears witness to Christ.

Not me, him, he says. In verse 19, this is the witness, this is the testimony of John. And we see all the different ways that John accomplished that.

Pointing to Christ. And it begins with this interaction with the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders, they're very, very important people in Jerusalem. They've sent a delegation to investigate what is going up on in Galilee.

There's this great buzz. There's this great stir. There's a man eating honey and locusts, dressed in camel skin. The people are going wild for him. He lives in the wilderness.

[6 : 01] They go out to him and he baptizes them. John is the phenomenon of his day. His ministry has caused a great stir. His preaching has had an impact on people's lives.

Years, after years and years and decades and centuries of silence, God is now speaking. Once again, there's a prophetic voice that was being heard in Israel.

And so now they come. You can imagine the film crews are there, aren't they? The TV are there. The radio are there. It's disturbing the religious authorities. They're troubled. They're bothered by this outlier and John's independence.

Here is this rogue Levite preacher with no real theological education, attracting all this attention, and people follow him. And the religious establishment, it's a big problem to them.

Because even though he was clearly unorthodox in his manner, there's something unmistakable of God about him. He's unorthodox in his manner and in his preaching, and yet there's something unmistakably of God about him.

[7 : 12] There's a power and authority in his words. And so here they come. They come thinking, who does he think he is? Presenting himself as the Messiah.

So they come from Jerusalem. And despite the success of John the Baptist's ministry, he is totally unaffected by his success. He knows that compared to the effects of the ministry of the one who is to come, the effects of his ministry are like nothing.

He knows who the one is to come, and he knows what the one who is coming will accomplish. And so the delegation arrived, the TV crews, they're all there, and look at the interaction.

It's brilliant. Verse 20, the first reporter says, who are you? Everyone's talking about you. They puff him up a little bit. Verse 20, he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, here it is, I am not the Christ.

Verse 21, they asked him, what then, are you Elijah? Another reporter has a go, and says, well, are you Elijah? You know the prophet from long ago.

[8 : 28] Is it you? He said, I'm not. Third reporter, getting slightly nervous, says, well, are you the prophet?

And he answered, no. So they said, well, who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? The director in the year piece is saying, keep going, ask for more.

And he says, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said. And we'll cut back to the studio on that point.

Jesus is the great I am, isn't it? It's been said that John is the great I am not. I am not. No. Who are you? John says, listen to me, I'm a voice.

I'm a voice of one crying in the wilderness. I'm just an announcer. I'm just the warm-up guy. And that's all I am.

[9 : 35] So don't inquire about me. There's nothing here for you to discover. There's nothing more you're going to find out about me. It's not important. Just listen. Just listen to what I'm saying. I'm just a voice. Listen to what John says in verse 25.

He says there, doesn't he? They asked him, then why are you baptizing if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet? And John answered them, I baptize with water. But among you stands one you do not know.

You don't even know him. even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The next day, he saw Jesus coming towards him and he says, behold, stop what you're doing. Shut up and look. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is he of whom I said after me, comes a man who ranks before me because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed to Israel.

[10:42] And John bore witness. I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and it remained on him. 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.

And I've seen and I've borne witness that this is the Son of God. Look at all the ways that John bears witness and points to Jesus. His preaching prepares the way for Christ's preaching. His baptism prepares the way for a far greater baptism that Christ will bring. His theological description exalts and magnifies Christ. His direct references called people's attention to what he was doing.

Look there, he says. There he is. Look at him. He's the one. And then very deliberately he takes his own disciples, his own followers and he says to them, this is remarkable, he says, you don't want to follow me.

Don't waste your time following me. Follow him. It's an amazing, flabbergasting pattern for Christian leaders, isn't it?

[11:51] Don't follow me. Don't lean on me. Don't waste your time following me. Follow him. And then, John, very deliberately, doesn't he, encourages the transfer of their allegiance to Jesus.

And so in all those ways, John bore witness to Christ. Not me, him. Three words. Not me, him. That's my life's mission. And so these verses in chapter one, they sell out several different ways, don't they? That John spells out the supremacy of the Lord Jesus.

These verses really emphasize how John went about doing it. How faithfully John was. But the real question that we need to get to this morning is the why.

Why did John do this? Why was John willing to call all attention to the Lord Jesus? What is it about the Christ that makes it so important to John that he is resolutely refusing to be deterred from his mission?

[12:59] Why is he pointing to Christ? There's three things. Number one, I think this. John the Baptist knew the identity of Jesus. John the Baptist knew the identity of Jesus.

He knew who Jesus was. John comprehended. He had grasped something of the majestic divine identity of Jesus. Look at verse 30.

It's a remarkable verse. He says, after me comes a man who ranks before me because he was before me. You got that? After me, comes a man who ranks before me.

He's more important than I am because he was before me. Now, I don't know how familiar you are with your Bible, but do you remember they were related to one another? John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus.

John's mother, Elizabeth, is Jesus' mother, Mary's cousin. I think I've got that right. Elizabeth and Mary were cousins, the two mothers.

[14:05] And so, John and Jesus are related. And in human terms of chronology, the human chronology when you read the other Gospels is that John is older than Jesus. By about six months we probably think.

And yet, he says, can you see it? Verse 30, he was before me. So that, so what in the world is John saying? He's saying to Jesus, I know who you are.

I know who you are. What has John understood? John has understood chapter 1, verse 1, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And he was in the beginning with God.

And he understood that that Word had become flesh and there, his cousin, Jesus is the incarnate Word. He points to an ordinary looking Jewish carpenter in his late 20s and he says, I'm not unworthy to untie the straps of that guy's sandals.

And they say to him, isn't he your cousin? And he said, yeah. And he is the Word. And he is God. That's why he says in verse 34, can you see there?

[15 : 22] And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God. This is the Word made flesh, very God, a very God, one with the Father, identical in essence with the Father in whom the fullness of God now dwells in bodily form.

And so the first reason why John points to Jesus is because John the Baptist understands who he is, that he is the Word made flesh and that he is from the beginning. Here's the second reason why John points to Jesus.

Because Jesus is the one in whom there is complete forgiveness of sin. Jesus is the one in whom there is complete forgiveness of sin.

Look very slowly and very carefully at verse 29. The next day, John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And when John uses that language, that image, that metaphor, the Lamb of God, there are images, background images, there are flashbacks to the Old Testament.

[16 : 43] And as some people would no doubt have thought back to Genesis 22 and the story of Abraham about the sacrifice of his son on the mountain and God stops him and says, Look behind you and God provides a lamb.

Some of them would have been thinking of that. Many of them would have been thinking of Isaiah 53 where the prophet says there's going to be a lamb who's going to bear the sins of many who will suffer on our behalf.

But I think most of the people who heard that would have been thinking, because they celebrated it every year, they would have been thinking of the Passover lamb. They would have been thinking about that sacrifice for covering, a sacrifice for atoning, a sacrifice for forgiveness.

And with that meaning in their minds that God had rescued them through the blood of a lamb, John now points to Jesus and he says, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

I'm not sure how fully aware John the Baptist was of the implications of what he was saying. I think John the Baptist speaks here more than he realises.

[17 : 57] But 50 years later when the apostle John is writing this gospel, reflecting on these words of John the Baptist right back at the beginning, he's seen the sinless life, he's seen the sacrificial death of Christ, he's experienced in his own soul the purifying effects of the death of Jesus.

And as he sits and writes and records, you can just imagine John the apostle, can't you, with his pen in his hand recounting that moment when John the Baptist said those words? Recounting the gospel in all its fullness of the sinless life and the substitutionary death of Jesus.

John the Baptist points to Jesus because in him this morning, right now, there is complete forgiveness of sin. It's so simple, isn't it, that Jesus came to take away our sin and our rebellion and your guilt.

Look again at verse 29, just notice that word away. He's taking it away. the Lamb of God, behold, look at him, think on him, observe him, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Listen to these words from Bruce Mill, he's a great preacher in Canada, a Scottish guy, listen closely to this because I suspect that maybe, you may be sitting here this morning and you need to hear these words.

[19 : 36] It's what Bruce Mill says, he says, few aspects of the gospel need greater or more frequent affirmation than this one. How many people struggle for survival beneath crushing burdens of guilt but Christ, the Lamb of God, really has borne it all for us.

He says to us today, son, daughter, your sins are forgiven, your sins, your sinful deeds, I will remember no more.

Behold the Lamb of God. Not me, him. John points us to Jesus because in him and only in him is found complete forgiveness for our sins.

One more reason John points us to Jesus is because in Jesus there's new life. in Jesus you can be born again into new life.

John points us to Jesus because he is life. Look at verse 31. I myself did not know him but for this purpose I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed to Israel.

[20 : 58] John bore witness, I saw the spirit descend from heaven like a dove and it remained on him. 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 that is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

Why is John using baptism language? And it is because baptism is pointing you to something. It is an initiatory experience.

Baptism speaks to you of being brought into something new. It points us to new life. That new life can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is what it says to Lily. It says to Lily her baptism speaks to her and it speaks to you by saying new life, the washing of your sin can only be found in Christ and new life in the Holy Spirit can only be found in Christ.

It is one thing isn't it to have your sins forgiven. But if all it is that your sins are forgiven, all that does is bring you up to zero. You've been in the hole and now you've been brought out of the hole.

[22 : 13] You're just at zero. But Jesus came not just to forgive your sins. Listen to this children and young people. Jesus came not just to forgive your sins, he came to give you new life.

New life in God's Spirit. And so Jesus came not just to forgive but to give new life and he baptises with the Holy Spirit. The language of baptising with the Holy Spirit it is the language of new spiritual life.

So you think of Adam in the Garden of Eden and God breathed into him his Spirit and gave him life. C.S. Lewis he picks it up doesn't he with Aslan.

Aslan breathes on the stony figures. Do you remember? And they come to life. And so Christ breathes the Holy Spirit. He gives the Holy Spirit.

He causes us to be born again into new spiritual life. Just look at chapter 3 in verse 3 flick over as we finish. Jesus answered Nicodemus this kind of religious man religious leader truly truly I say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

[23 : 25] Nicodemus said to him what do you want about how can a man be born when he's old can he enter a second time into his mother's temple and be born? Jesus answered truly truly I say to you unless one is born of water that's the natural birth and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit God's desire from the beginning for us to have life which we have forfeited through our rebellion of saying God I do not want you to be in control I am in control our rebellion against Christ and now God offers to us in the Lord Jesus new life Jesus baptises with the spirit he gives life to us by his spirit there is life in him and he gives freely to all who will turn to him and that's why John points to him let me finish it's really hot isn't it let me call your attention one last time to verses 34 and 35 chapter 1 verse 34 and 35 just look at it

John says I've seen and have borne witness that this is the son of God the next day again John was standing with two of his disciples and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said behold the lamb of God the two disciples heard him say this and they followed Jesus just imagine the scene for a moment he's already announced very broadly very publicly behold the lamb of God and now it appears that John is standing with two of his disciples one of them is likely to be the guy who has actually written this gospel and Jesus walks by John the Baptist just turns to them his own followers and says there he is behold the lamb of God and look what happens it's an amazing thing so undramatic verse 37 the two disciples heard him say this they followed

Jesus and clearly John as we're going to see again and again is writing on two levels yes the disciples physically started walking after Jesus but more significantly they're taking their first steps aren't there into a new life and that's John's purpose that's why John wrote his gospel that's why we're preaching it that you might know that new life just come with me sorry I told you it was the last reference but that's not true chapter 3 verse 25 as a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and Jews over purification and they came to John and said to him Rabbi John the Baptist he was with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness look he's baptizing people and all are going after him you're losing followers John answered a person cannot receive even one thing unless it's given to him from heaven you yourselves bear me witness that I said I'm not the Christ but I've been sent before him the one who has the bride is the bridegroom the friend of the bridegroom well he stands and he hears him and he rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice therefore this joy of mine is now complete why he must increase but I must decrease not me him and it might be really tempting and maybe I've preached this wrongly this morning you might think that my message is be like John the Baptist and point others to Jesus and that's a very good message but it isn't the message of John 1 it isn't the message of John 1 because we are not being called to follow John's example and point others to Christ that we should do that the message in John 1 the main thing here is follow John's eyes and follow John's finger and follow John's voice the

reason why God had

John the apostle write this was not so that you should follow John the Baptist but so that you would hear and believe the truth spoken by John the Baptist and follow Christ and that we would know Christ and we would know forgiveness of sins in Christ and new life in spirit that we would have life in him and we follow Christ and live for Christ all the days of our lives and live to his glory let's pray