

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Basic Essentials of Witnessing John 1:29-34 Part 2

The professing church seems to be very comfortable with being identified with Christ in going to church or perhaps by putting a "sign of the fish" decal on their car bumper. But "is the church prepared to effectively share Christ with the World?" "Are you prepared to effectively share Christ with the world?"

The answer to this question, I believe, largely depends upon how faithfully we are following the example of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was, if not the greatest witness to Christ the world has ever known, certainly one of a select few. What made him so successful? The life of John the Baptist was characterized by certain basic witnessing essentials. This leads us back to the question that we began to answer last week.

The question we that began to answer last week is this, "What are the basic *essentials* highlighted in John 1:19-34 that must characterize an effective witness for Christ? What are the basic essentials highlighted for us in this passage through the example of John the Baptist?"

The first basic essential that characterizes an effective witness for Christ is *humility* (John 1:19-28). Let me read this passage for you, "**And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' (20) And he confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed, 'I am not the Christ,' (21) And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' And he said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' (22) They said then to him, 'Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?' (23) He said, 'I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord," as Isaiah the prophet said,' (24) Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. (25) And they asked him, and said to him, 'Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?' (26) John answered them saying, 'I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. (27) It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.' (28) These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing."** John was not about John, he was all about Jesus.

When he looked at his ministry he simply considered himself a voice of a road worker calling people to clear away debris from the roadway in preparation for the coming King. This is what he meant when he described himself as "a voice of one crying in the wilderness; make straight the way of the Lord."

When John the Baptist looked at his own personal standing in comparison to Christ he considered himself as being less than a slave. This was communicated by his very emphatic statement in **John 1:27, "It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."**

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What basic essential do we need to possess if we are going to be an effective witness for Christ? It begins with "humility." It begins with this attitude, "I am nothing and He is everything." If somehow our comfort, our pleasure, our recognition is more important than Jesus and what He wants us to do with our lives we will never be a truly effective witness for Christ.

Hopefully each of you this morning is saying, "That's me! My life is all about Jesus." And that is great if this is true, but there is still one more basic essential.

The second basic essential that characterizes an effective witness is an *accurate* portrayal of Christ (John 1:29-34). This is so essential that we have established an evangelism training program here in our church called Evangelism Explosion. This training program will help you immeasurably do exactly what we see modeled in the life of John the Baptist.

If we are going to bear witness to Christ we must communicate clearly and accurately exactly what the scriptures tell us about Jesus. We cannot to be timid about these things or vague. We must put it out there for all those who come across the path of our lives to see. Certainly this was true of John the Baptist. How do we see John the Baptist portraying Christ accurately in John 1:29-34?

John the Baptist accurately portrayed the *work* of Christ in John 1:29. Let me read for you this particular verse, "**The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.'**" John the Baptist was not lacking for visitors. He had a visit from a group of men representing the Sanhedrin in **John 1:19-28**, and now in **John 1:29**, we see Jesus coming to John the Baptist to visit him as well.

And how did John the Baptist respond when he saw Jesus coming toward him? John the Baptist responds to the visit of Jesus by accurately bearing witness to His work. But what is the work of Jesus? Did He come to provide us with good ethical teaching? No! Did He come to provide an example? No! Did He come to provide us with a new religious system? No!

The work of Jesus according to the testimony of John the Baptist was to take away the *sin* of the world.

This is an incredible statement. So let us take some time and try to fully understand what he means when he says that Jesus came to take away the sin of the world.

Let us begin by looking at the very first word of the verse. How does the verse begin? He says, "Behold." The word "behold" is an imperative. It is a command. John the Baptist wanted all those around him to look at Jesus. He did not want them staring off into space. He did not want them to be looking off in some other direction. He wanted them to look at Jesus. And while they were looking at Jesus, John the Baptist in the clearest possible terms told them that this person whom they were looking at would in fact take away the sin of the world.

The statement could very well have staggered a Jewish audience. So John the Baptist tries to help them understand what he meant. How does he do this?

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John the Baptist tries to help them understand how Jesus could take away the sin of the world by referring to Him as the "Lamb of God." How would the Jews have understood John's reference to Jesus as God's lamb? Lambs were the heart of the sacrificial system of the old covenant.

There was the "passover lamb" offered once a year as a sin offering. This commemorated the exodus from Egypt. We see this in **Exodus 12:12-13**. There were also lambs of burnt offering, the morning and evening sacrifices every day and twice on the Sabbaths. We see this in **Lev. 1:4**. Then there was the lamb of the trespass offering, which was offered as required when some particular defilement excluded a person from attending worship. We see this in **Num. 6:12**. In all these cases, lambs were sacrificed to provide legal purification for ceremonial defilement. They visibly demonstrated the need for an atonement in order to remove the pollution and penalty of sin, and effect reconciliation between God and sinners.

The Jewish people were very familiar with the sacrificial lambs they brought to be offered up year after year by the priests, as demanded by the Mosaic Law. And it would be very reasonable for us to think that as John was addressing his Jewish audience here in **John 1:29**, calling Jesus the Lamb of God, that it was in the context of the Old Testament sacrificial system that his words would have been interpreted.

Let me ask you this question. How effective were these sacrifices that the Jewish people brought year after year to be offered up by their priests? They were not effective at all. Listen to **Hebrews 10:1-4**, "**For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. (2) Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? (3) But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. (4) For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats (or lambs) to take away sins.**"

The *animal* sacrifices brought by the Jewish people did not take away sin (Hebrews 10:1-4). Obviously there needed to be a better sacrifice, and certainly this was not going to be a lamb brought by the Jewish people year after year to be offered up by their priests. Rather the better sacrifice was a sacrifice that was provided by God Himself. Let me read for you **Heb. 10:5-10** "**Therefore, when He comes into the world, (or in other words when the lamb of God comes into this world), He says "Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired, but a body thou hast prepared for Me; (6) In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure. (7) Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the roll of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will.'** (8) After saying above, 'sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast not desired, nor hast Thou taken pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the Law), (9) then he Said, 'Behold, I have come to do Thy will.' He takes away the first in order to establish the second. (10) **By this we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**" Though animal sacrifices brought by the Jewish people did not take away sin, God's *Lamb* did (Hebrews 10:5-10).

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As John the Baptist was drawing attention to Jesus and calling Him, "the Lamb of God" I would imagine that John the Baptist was hoping that at the very moment in time that a light would go on in the minds and hearts of his Jewish audience. Where all of a sudden all of the pieces of the Jewish sacrificial system would suddenly fall into place and they would see Jesus, not only as their Messiah but as their sin-bearer and not only as their sin bearer but the sin-bearer of the entire world. What did the verse say? **"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."**

Professing Christians when seeking to witness for Christ are so often times fearful of boldly proclaiming the death of God's sacrificial Lamb. There is no way that you or I can be an effective witness for Christ unless we are willing, just as John the Baptist was willing, to say to the people in our lives, **"Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."**

After spelling out for us the work of Christ in **John 1:29**, he goes on to elaborate for us why He is so perfectly qualified to be God's Lamb. He goes on to elaborate why He was so perfectly qualified to take away the sin of the world.

John the Baptist did not only accurately portray the work of Christ, but he accurately portrayed the person of Christ (John 1:30-34).

Let me read for you **John 1:30-34**, **"This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for He was before me. (31) And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water. (32) And John bore record, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and It abode upon Him. (33) And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. (34) And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.'" What did John the Baptist say about the person of Christ? John the Baptist accurately declared Jesus to be the Son of God (John 1:34)"**

Let us take a few minutes and look at these five verses more carefully. Let us begin by reading **John 1:30** **"This is He on behalf of whom I said, After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I; for He existed before me."** The Apostle John once again, as he did in John 1:15, impresses upon us what John the Baptist declared concerning the man he said was coming. He had told the Jewish people that the man who was coming was of a higher rank because He had preceded him, not in time but in eternity. In other words the man who was coming was not a mere man. The man who was coming was more than a man. He was the infinite God-man.

Let us go on and read **John 1:31**, **"And I did not recognize Him: but in order that he should be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water."** John is going back in time prior to the baptism of Jesus in order to elaborate on the events that had led him to reveal Jesus as the Messiah. He is going back in time in order to elaborate on the events that had led him to reveal Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world

He begins by saying, **"And I did not recognize Him."** What does he mean when he says, **"And I did not recognize Him."**

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This does not mean that prior to his public proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah that if John the Baptist had met Jesus on the street that he would not have recognized him. Of course he would have recognized Him as Jesus. Why do I say this? According to **Luke 1:36**, Mary, the mother of Jesus was a relative of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. John the Baptist and Jesus were family (Luke 1:36). Of course John the Baptist would have recognized Him as Jesus if he met him on the street.

If "**I did not recognize Him**" does not mean that John the Baptist did not recognize Jesus at all. Perhaps it means that he just did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. This seems reasonable on the surface. But even this seems rather far fetched in light of the fact that his parents not only knew according to **Luke 1:17** their son John was the forerunner of Christ but they also knew the identity of the Messiah Himself according to **Luke 1:43**. I believe that it would be very reasonable to suspect that John the Baptist had more than just a passing suspicion about the true identity of Jesus based on the information available to him through his family. In fact I believe that John the Baptist had a personal conviction that Jesus was the Messiah prior to the baptism of Christ (Matthew 3:13-14).

Let me read for **Matthew 3:13-14**, "**Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. (14) But John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?’**" How convinced was John the Baptist that Jesus was in fact the Messiah? I believe John was very convinced.

If "**and I did not recognize him**" does not mean he did not recognize Jesus at all, and if it does not mean that he did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah then what does it mean?

When John the Baptist said that he "did not recognize" Jesus, he is saying that his personal conviction had not been officially *confirmed* by a certain specific supernatural sign

John the Baptist was very well known throughout Palestine for his baptizing ministry, as we saw last week in **John 1:19-28**. But though he was baptizing large numbers of Jews in the wilderness in order to prepare them for the coming King, he did not tell them the identity of the King based on his personal conviction. He did not do this because a certain specific supernatural sign had not yet confirmed his personal conviction. What was the sign he was waiting for? The certain specific supernatural sign that John the Baptist had been waiting for was the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism (John 1:31-33).

Let us read **John 1:31-33** "**And I did not recognize Him but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing. (32) And John bore witness saying, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven and He remained on Him. (33) And I did not recognize Him but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit."**

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Why was John the Baptist waiting to make Jesus known publicly as the Messiah? He was waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism.

It was then, and only then, that his conviction concerning Jesus would be officially confirmed and John the Baptist's public proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah could begin.

Notice the phrase, "**This is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.**" What is the significance of this phrase? John's baptism pictured the removal of sin in preparation for the King, but the baptism of Jesus in the Holy Spirit pictured the bestowal of new *life* in God. In fact, this bestowal of a new life in God was an Old Testament theme. Let me read for you **Ezekiel 36:24-27**, "**For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land. (25) Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. (26) Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh, (27) and I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and will be careful to My ordinances.**" Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Obviously it has not yet been fulfilled? The Jews certainly have not yet fully been gathered back to the land of Israel. And clearly they do not have the heart toward the Lord that is spoken of in this passage.

This prophesy will not be fulfilled until Christ returns to set up his Messianic kingdom but even so when John the Baptist told his listeners "This is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit," there is no way that His Jewish audience would not have thought of **Ezekiel 36:24-27**. And who in this passage was seen as putting the Holy Spirit in the Jewish people or in the vernacular of **John 1:33** who in this passage was seen as baptizing in the Holy Spirit. It was God Himself. If it is only God who can put the Holy Spirit in our heart and it is only God that can baptize in the Holy Spirit. Then what does this make Jesus? *God!*

And this leads us to **John 1:34**. In light of all that John the Baptist had seen and observed, in light of all that he had come to know, in light of all that had been confirmed to Him at the Baptism of Jesus he then says in **John 1:34**, "**And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.**"

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CONCLUSION

In preparing for this message I came across this story by one particular commentator and he related the following story:

"I was on a speaking engagement in San Diego, I decided to visit the Timkin Art Museum. I had heard they had an El Greco painting of "St. Peter Holding the Keys to the Kingdom." I paid my money, walked into the museum, found the painting, and looked at the El Greco in admiration. Then I turned around, on the opposite wall was a small, walnut-colored painting that had been painted in the year 1525. As I looked closely, I saw it was a lamb almost photographically rendered. Around the Lamb's head, barely perceptible, was a halo. As I looked more intently, I saw that the lamb's legs were tied and that the animal, shrouded by the dark background, was lying on a cross. The title was AGNUS DIE, Latin for "Lamb of God." I wanted to weep.

May God in his grace bless us with the opportunity to display Christ to the world in this very same accurate way. Not on a painter's canvas but with our words. I know that some will be better at this than others. But this does not mean that each of us should not prepare ourselves as best as we can to do the best that we can.

Are you *prepared* to accurately paint a picture of the Son of God offering Himself up as God's Lamb in order to take away the sin of the world?