

Look, the Lamb of God

John 1:19-34

Key Verse: 1:29

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’”

In John’s gospel, John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus appears two times. The first testimony, in 1:19-36, was at the beginning of his ministry when John was very popular. Yet he was not proud, but very humble. The last testimony, in 3:22-36, was at the end of his ministry when it was diminishing day by day. But he was not discouraged; he was full of joy. In a word, he had freedom in his heart. He freely testified about Jesus in any situation. He is exemplary in his witness to Jesus. All believers are called to be Jesus’ witnesses as part of a royal priesthood to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pet 2:9). In Acts 1:8, Jesus commanded, **“You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”** Witnessing to Jesus is essential for Christians. It rejuvenates our spirits like living water. It becomes a spring of life to those who are perishing in this dark world. If we do not witness to Jesus, our spirits shrivel up and we are choked by evil spirits around us and become like the Dead Sea. However, it is not easy to testify about Jesus freely. We are easily bound by self-consciousness, pride, sinful desires, fear, or fatalism. In addition, we are often so overwhelmed by our own life struggles and challenges that we have no room in our hearts to testify about Jesus. How can we testify about Jesus freely like John the Baptist? Let’s learn in today’s passage: his attitude as a witness (19-28), and the contents of his testimony (29-34).

First, the attitude of a witness (19-28). In this part we learn two things.

First of all, John did not fail to confess, but confessed freely (19-21). John was the last prophet of the Old Testament. There had been no prophets in Israel for approximately 400 years, since the prophet Malachi. God was silent because of the sin of the Israelites. Without the word of God people were spiritually thirsty. When the time had fully come, God sent John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah. John baptized people in the desert and preached the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, preparing the way for the Lord (Mk 1:4). He said, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”** (Mt 3:2). Surprisingly, the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem came to him, confessing their sins, and to be baptized (Mk 1:5). People were greatly moved by John’s simple lifestyle and his spirit-filled message. There was a great spiritual

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revival. John's ministry grew and grew until he shook the country. He became a national hero. People wondered if he might be the Christ (Lk 3:15).

When the Jewish leaders heard this, they felt threatened and became unhappy. So they sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was (19). If John had simply kept quiet, or nodded his head, many people would have assumed he was the Messiah. He could have been a very powerful leader. The allure of such power could have been a great temptation to him. Yet he did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, saying, **"I am not the Messiah"** (20). It is amazing that he confessed this so freely and courageously. Then they asked, **"Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"** They thought Elijah would come and restore Israel in glory before the day of the Lord (Mal 4:5). John the Baptist resembled Elijah in his lifestyle, spirit and power. Jesus confirmed that John the Baptist was Elijah (Mt 17:12). Yet John said, **"I am not"** (21a). It meant, "I am not the one you expected." **Then they said, "Are you the Prophet?"** (21b). The Prophet refers to the one who was coming and would be like Moses (Dt 18:15), through whom the Law was given (1:17). John answered, **"No."** (21c). Here we see a pattern. John spoke about himself less and less each time he was asked a question. Usually people talk about themselves more and more and make their listeners very tired. Why do they do this? It is because they want to be recognized, appreciated and validated. All human beings have a desire to be recognized and praised by others. If they are not recognized by people they feel very sorry about themselves and demonstrate in many ways. In their desperation for recognition, some people become crazy. John, however, was free from this sinful desire. How could he be so free? It was because he knew who he was. He was nothing but a sinner before God. When people praised him, he was not deceived by Satan's sweet whispering. Like John, Apostle Paul also kept his humility in the midst of God's great work. He said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst" (1 Ti 1:15b). Anyone who wants to be a witness of Jesus must know God's grace upon them, and that he or she is a terrible sinner.

Secondly, John said, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness" (22-28).

Finally, the investigators became nervous and said, **"Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"** (22) At first, when they asked who John was, they seemed to have a sincere desire to know the truth about John. But here they reveal that they had no spiritual desire at all. They simply wanted to take an official answer back to their leaders. Such people are unworthy of an answer. John, however, spoke to them with a shepherd's heart, quoting Isaiah to somehow open their spiritual eyes. He said, **"I am the**

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voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord’” (23). A voice is merely an instrument to convey a message. It disappears after delivering the message. Jesus is the Word. John was the voice which testified to the Word. John’s mission was to prepare the way for the Lord. He was like the herald of a king who went before him to help people prepare for his coming. When John said that he was “the voice,” it meant that he was nothing, and Jesus is everything.

When John referred to himself as, **“the voice of one calling in the wilderness,”** he had a clear identity and mission from God. He received God’s calling to be the forerunner of the Messiah. This was his source of courage, confidence and strength that enabled him to go through hardships, such as misunderstanding, rejection, temptations, persecutions, prison and even martyrdom. How could John have such a clear identity? Luke 1:80b says, **“...he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.”** Luke 3:2 says, **“the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.”** In the Bible, the wilderness has great meaning. Moses, David and Elijah were all trained in the wilderness and encountered God in the wilderness. Even Jesus went through the devil’s temptation in the wilderness. The wilderness is a lonely, isolated place. There is no fun or convenience. There is no electricity, cell phone, computer, i-pad, Internet, television, theatre, sports stadium, shopping mall, or the like. The wilderness is the place to listen to God’s voice and encounter God personally without distraction. We are living in a highly developed human culture, and enjoy technology. But sometimes we feel swallowed up by it. We feel that our relationships are superficial and even cut off. We are losing spirituality, feeling that God is far from us. This is the root cause of the identity crisis which so many people suffer from. We need a wilderness in which we can listen to God’s voice and encounter God. This wilderness can be anywhere, even in the city. Let’s go to the wilderness and listen to God’s voice and find our true identity in God.

The Pharisees who had been sent questioned John, **“Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”** (24-25). They wanted to accuse John of baptizing without a license from the religious authorities. They were not concerned about the work of God that was being done through John. They were concerned about being in control of things. John did not argue with them. He downplayed his own work in order to magnify Jesus. He said, **“I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie”** (26-27). John realized that Jesus is God Incarnate. When he knew who Jesus was, he could

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find himself as an unworthy servant. When we find God in Jesus, we can realize that we are unworthy servants. John Calvin said in his Institutes of the Christian Religion that knowing God and knowing ourselves are closely related. Without knowing God we cannot know ourselves. Without knowing that God is holy, we are satisfied with our own self-righteousness. We say, “At least I am a little better than that guy.” But when we see God’s holiness, all our self-righteousness is like dirty rags. Then we can find ourselves as terrible sinners, as Isaiah and Peter discovered (Isa 6:5; Lk 5:8). We need to know God in order to know that we are unworthy servants. Verse 28 concludes, **“This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.”**

Second, the contents of John's testimony (29-34). Let’s read verse 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!’”** It seems that Jesus came to John to be baptized. As soon as John saw Jesus, he cried out, **“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”** It was a description of the core of the Messiah’s work. The phrase “Lamb of God” has a deep root in the Jewish sacrificial system. Its origin is in Exodus 12. The Israelites were groaning in slavery to the Egyptian king, Pharaoh. They were powerless to escape even though they were treated mercilessly. In their desperate situation, they cried out to God. He heard their prayers and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God sent Moses as a deliverer. Moses challenged the power of Pharaoh through plagues sent from God. But Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the Israelites go even though his country was being devastated by the plagues.

Finally, God sent a plague of death on the firstborn of Egypt. It was a head-crushing blow. In the midst of this judgment, God provided a way for the Israelites to be saved. Did God manifest legions of angels to protect them? No. Just year-old lambs without defect. God instructed them to slaughter the lambs and smear their blood on the doorframes of their houses. The awful night came. The angel of death passed through Egypt to strike down the firstborn sons, from that of the king to that of the lowest slave. There was great wailing in Egypt that night. However, whenever the angel of death saw blood on a doorframe, he passed over that house. Those inside were spared. On that night, nothing else could save them - only the blood of the lamb. The blood of the lamb had power to save people from judgment. The blood of the lamb foreshadowed the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Pharaoh stands for the power of sin and Satan. It was so strong that no one could escape from it. The wages of sin is death; sin demands the death penalty. We must die and shed our blood because of our sins. In order to set us free from sin and Satan we

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need the power of the blood of the lamb. Jesus became the Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7) which God provided. Nothing and no one in the world - no idea, no money, no medicine can save us from the power of sin and death. Only the blood of Jesus can do that. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”**

Jesus' sacrifice is perfect. In the Old Testament, whenever people sinned, they offered animal sacrifices for atonement. But its value was not sufficient and its effect did not last. Every time they sinned, they had to bring another animal sacrifice to God. This was only a shadow of things to come. Jesus is the reality. Jesus is the sinless Son of God. His shedding blood was once for all to bring eternal salvation. Hebrews 9:14 says, **“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.”**

John proclaimed that the Lamb of God **“takes away the sin of the world.”** This reminds us of the scapegoat in Leviticus. The high priest would lay his hands on the head of a live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites - all their sins - and put them on the goat. Then the goat carried them away into the wilderness (Lev 16:21-22). Jesus became like this scapegoat. Isaiah 53:6b says, **“...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** O, poor goat! Poor Jesus! But thanks to Jesus, who takes away the sin of the world!

How can we receive this blessing? Can we buy it with money? Can we earn it by punishing ourselves, doing some work, or making an achievement? John said, **“Look.”** This means to give our full attention. We need to turn our eyes away from the world to Jesus and away from ourselves to Jesus. Then we can have our sins taken away. Hebrews 12:1b describes a characteristic of sin that it **“so easily entangles.”** For example, even though one repented of pride, he or she might find it rise again. Right after repenting lustful desires, one can find they came back again. We know that complaining is not right before God. So we decided not to complain, but to be thankful in all circumstances. But the next moment we find complaints are coming out of our mouths naturally. We know that we should not be selfish, so we try hard to live a sacrificial life. But lo and behold, selfishness is right there again to entangle us. These sins bind us and deprive us of freedom and rob us of joy. These sins hinder us from testifying about Jesus freely. How can we

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be free from the entanglement of sin? We have to look at Jesus. Only the blood of Jesus can free us. Through the blood of Jesus we receive the forgiveness of sins and experience true joy and freedom. Then we can freely testify about Jesus.

In verse 30, John said, **“This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”** Here John testifies that Jesus is the Eternal God. When this Jesus died as the Lamb of God, it was not mere human blood that he shed. It was the blood of the Son of God. This is why his blood is so powerful to take away the sin of the world. How did John know that Jesus is the Son of God? He emphasized that he himself did not know Jesus (31,33a). But by the illumination of the Holy Spirit he could know Jesus who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (32,33b). So he said, **“I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One”** (34). God’s Chosen One means the Son of God. Here we learn that the Holy Spirit points to Jesus and testifies to Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot know who Jesus is. When we receive the Holy Spirit, our spiritual eyes open and we can know Jesus as God and become humble and testify about Jesus.

Billy Sunday was a baseball player with the Chicago White Sox in the 1880’s. He liked to spend his spare time in saloons with other players who would drink alcohol and gamble. One afternoon, he heard a team from Pacific Garden Missions singing gospel songs. He was reminded of the hymns his mother used to sing to him. He began to look at Christ. When he looked at Christ, all his sins were forgiven and joy and freedom came into his heart. After that he could testify about Jesus freely to many people. He went on to become the most famous evangelist in America in the first two decades of the 20th century. Of course, not all of us can be like him. But when we look at Jesus we can find the same freedom and joy that he experienced and we too can freely testify about Jesus. We can testify about Jesus to our children by teaching the Bible and singing hymns to them, like Billy Sunday’s mother. Also we can confess clearly, **“I am a Christian”** in our workplace or campus or home. When we do not testify, nothing happens. We become dry and barren. But when we look at Jesus and have true freedom in our hearts, we are ready to testify. When opportunity comes, we can be used by God to bring people to Jesus. Let’s prepare the 2013 International Summer Bible Conference by testifying to Jesus.