

Behold the Lamb of God
John 1:29-37

Who is your authority?

When I was 24, I spent some time as a Congressional Intern. It was not a glamorous job. When I applied I thought I would be crafting speeches and writing policy documents. Instead I was charged with getting coffee, filling the office refrigerator with sodas, getting the Congressman's tuna fish sandwich and running errands all over Capitol Hill. I was on the very bottom of the org chart. In fact, if there was an org chart, my name was written on a post-it note stuck to the corner.

But one day I did get a plum assignment calling a bunch of states to get information on a bill. On the first calls I made almost no progress. I was even hung up on a couple of times. But then I started using the name of the Congressman and his office—which was the House Minority Leader. And then, all the sudden, people wanted to answer my questions. They bent over backwards to accommodate me, when I used the name of the Congressman who at the time was one of most powerful men in Washington DC.

“Right away sir,” the person on the other end of the line would say. “Let me get that for you.”

Once I was put through right to the Governor's Chief of Staff. Another time I spoke directly to the Lieutenant Governor.

I learned a lot about authority that day and the power in not living by my authority but someone else's.

It's a lesson John knew too and he modeled for us.

You may remember that we are talking about three ways that John models Christian witness for us.

First, John lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, John lived differently and called others to live differently too.

Third, John pointed to Jesus.

The fullness of life that Jesus intends combines all three of these practices. And how we answer the question of “Who is my authority?” makes all the difference.

John was clear about his authority—even when he may have been tempted to claim his own.

John's fame spread far and wide all throughout the region of Palestine. When the news spread only by word of mouth, John was known even as far north as Galilee about 140 miles away. Much like Jesus would be within about a year, John was the talk everywhere and people travelled far to see and hear John who was performing his ministry at a place called “Bethany beyond the Jordan.” **(insert map)**

And just like with Jesus, not everyone who came to hear John had good intentions. The religious leaders sent officials to spy on John and entrap him because he threatened their authority. They had a

two-part line of questioning designed to trick John into saying something he should not so they could discredit him and cause him to lose support among the masses so they could hang on their power.

First, they asked him “Who are you?”

And what they meant by that question is “Who is your authority?”

Today we are experiencing a crisis of authority.

We don't know who to believe. We don't trust the news media to play it straight. Many don't believe that elections are fair or all the votes are counted or that some votes are counted twice and others are illegitimate. We know that video evidence can be doctored. We don't trust our leaders to tell the truth or not profit from their position and decisions. We see people break the law and get away unpunished. We wonder who or what shadowy forces are really running things. We aren't quite sure who is really running things but it feels increasingly like we are being ruled rather than a free people.

And if Jesus is not our authority, if He is not on throne, we may very well be filled with worry and doubt. But when we know Jesus is on the throne, when He is our authority, we can overcome the murky, chaotic, angry evil around us.

Who is your authority?

John was clear about his authority.

He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

John 1:20

What does that mean? We need to say that Christ is not Jesus' last name. Jesus is not the son of Mary and Joseph Christ. The Word Christ is the English translation of the Greek word, *Christos*. Christos means anointed one, Messiah. For 1,000 years, God's people had been waiting for a Messiah, God's Anointed One, a singular, world-changing figure to come and set the world right.

And everyone within earshot of John saying, “I am not the Christ,” would have known exactly what John meant. By saying he was not the Christ, John was saying I am not God's anointed one. I am not the Messiah our people have been waiting on for 1000 years.”

OK....nothing to see there...darn it. Next the religious leaders asked John if he was the Old Testament prophet Elijah or “The Prophet” of whom Moses spoke about 1400 years earlier?

And John said no.

And this confounded the religious leaders because they thought they would nail him on one of those three questions. So they pressed the issue and John gave them a straight as an arrow answer:

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?” 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 1:22-23

You can see the religious leaders frustrated in their scheming because John kept denying his own authority. So, they unveiled part two of their strategy, the second line of questioning. If John was not the Messiah, if he was not Christ, if he was not the chosen one who had been talked about for nearly a millennium and he wasn't Elijah or the prophet—then why was John baptizing people? What authority did he have?

When we are challenged, when we are doubted, when others want to know how and why we can do what we do, there is no better strategy than pointing to Jesus.

And that's what John did.

John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

John 1:26

John knew who his authority and he did not fall prey to the temptation to seize the moment for himself and his own glory. John's biographer Frederick Brotherton described John's approach:

A weak man would have launched himself on the flowing tide of enthusiasm, and allowed himself to be swept away by its impetuous rush. What a mingling of strength and humility. When me suggested that he was the Christ that he was only a voice—the voice of a herald, whom men hardly notice, because they strain their eyes in the direction from which he has come, to behold the King Himself.

John resisted the urge to claim his own authority.

Instead, he told the religious leaders exactly who the Messiah is. John said He is right here. And you might think that news would excite the religious, people who, at least in theory, were waiting for a Messiah.

It did not.

Even though God's people had been waiting for 1,000 years, the religious leaders didn't want to see the Christ because His coming would disrupt their power and their lives. They wanted God on their own terms. They wanted a God to confirm their biases and preconceived notions. They wanted a God who didn't change anything about them at all. They saw John living differently but they had no desire to live differently at all. They liked things just the way they were because the way things were was very good for them.

That's not how the Lord operates. He is the supreme disruptor—especially if we are satisfied and smug and happy in our own righteousness. The Lord really disrupts the lives of people like that. John would have known this colorful warning for self-satisfied, religious people from the Old Testament prophet Amos:

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, 'Bring, that we may drink!' The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you,

**when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.
And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead; you shall be cast out...**

Amos 4:1-3

So those folks gave cows a bad name because they became fat and lazy in their self-righteous religious practice and the Lord lets them know, "I love you too much to see continue sinning and settling for a shadow of the fullness I have intended for you. am going to disrupt your life."

And He did.

And if you have followed Jesus for any amount of time in your life, you have probably experienced this. It has happened to me. I am satisfied. I am content. I am comfortable in my own self-righteousness. And that doesn't necessarily mean that I have a holier than thou attitude or I look down my nose at anyone. It sometimes just means that I have just set my ultimate joy and my peace on something I can do or I can achieve on my own and whatever that is becomes a wedge between myself and God. It means I have given something else in my life authority. I have put it in God's place.

And in His grace, God usually disrupts my life when I get to that place.

And I never like it. Nobody does. But in the end I am always grateful because by removing the lesser things from my life, God prepares the way for the best things in my life. The best things in life always come when recognize Jesus' authority, when we submit to His Lordship.

John said to the religious leaders, "I'm not the Christ. I'm not the Messiah. I'm not even close to that guy. I'm unfit to touch his dirty shoes. But the one who is going to disrupt your life, who is going to turn things upside down and shake it all out, he right here, right now, standing among us."

John pointed to Jesus. And it would have made the religious leaders very uncomfortable. In fact, just a few years later, these very same people who came out to aggressively question and trap John had a conversation about Jesus.

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

John 11:47-48

And then they set in motion a plot to kill him. And they succeeded from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning.

The next day, when the religious leaders were not around, John made explicit what he had been implying. John literally pointed to Jesus.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, 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." 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 have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

John 1:29-34

So, John was describing an event witnessed by many people. Jesus came to John and asked his cousin to baptize Him. John objected because he knew Jesus was sinless. He knew Jesus did not need to repent of anything. And John knew that Jesus is Lord and really He should be baptizing John. But Jesus insisted on being baptized because He lived for us

(insert image)

And there on the river, as Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, filling Him and the Heavenly Father announced to everyone who could see that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. And I want to talk about the Holy Spirit filling Jesus for just a moment because it directly applies to one of the three things that John modeled for us. And it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus modeled the very same thing for us.

One of the things we take for granted is that we tend to think that Jesus did what He did, performed miracles, healed the sick, raised the dead, preached with power and authority because He is God. But I don't think Scripture tells us that. Jesus of Nazareth is Divine, He has been and remains God from the moment of His conception. But His ministry didn't begin until the age of 30 when He was baptized by John and filled with the Holy Spirit. The Gospels repeat this multiple times. Here is one place in Luke:

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee and a report about him went out throughout all the surrounding country.

Luke 4:14

Jesus' acts of power—His miracles, His teaching, His authority was a product of the Holy Spirit at work in Him. Jesus could receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the fullness of God's presence because He was and is sinless. And in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, Jesus did amazing, jaw-dropping things.

The preacher and teacher A.W. Tozer put it like this:

I am persuaded that our Lord Jesus, while He was on earth, did not accomplish His powerful deeds in the strength of His deity. I believe He did them in the strength and authority of his Spirit-anointed humanity...Jesus did not begin His ministry until He had been anointed with the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus did His amazing works not from the strength of His Divinity but from His Holy Spirit filled humanity, it has amazing implications for us. First, it emphasizes our need to receive the Holy Spirit and be filled by Him because Jesus was. If Jesus, who was sinless, needed the Holy Spirit, how much more do we need the Holy Spirit?

It also speaks to our potential as followers of Jesus to do amazing things if we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, if we live by Jesus' authority and the Spirit's power in our life. Knowing that Jesus Himself lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, listen to this promise Jesus makes about receiving the Holy Spirit after He departs the earth:

Truly, truly I say to, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

John 14:12

Christ's ministry, the Kingdom of God comes not through our work but through the work of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit ministry is impossible but with the Holy Spirit all things are possible.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is so important and it is one of Jesus' most impactful promises for our life. And we receive the Holy Spirit by allowing Jesus to be our authority and asking the Holy Spirit to come and take charge of our life. It comes back to the question, "Who is your authority?"

We all have a tell here, a way we can know who our real authority is.

It's how we manage our sin.

First, who tells us what is sinful? Is it God's Word? Is it someone else? Is it social media? Is it our teacher? Is it the corporations whose products we buy? Do we let the place where we buy our coffee tell us what sin is? Do we let the company who signs our paychecks or our clients who we let tell us what is right and what is wrong? Or maybe we just 'follow our heart?'

And when we do sin, how do we atone? How do we make it right? Do we just feel increasingly bad about who we are? Do we give away our money to people who promise to create a better, more just world? Do we publicly decry our unholiness on Facebook? Do we let others we have wronged punish us to set things right?

Who we let manage our sin says so much about who has the authority in our life.

The religious leaders, if they were not already threatened by John, would have been very concerned for their authority when John told them someone new was here to manage the people's sins. You see, these religious leaders were in the sin management business. And business was good. But John told them they would soon be shutting their doors.

John pointed at Jesus and said "**Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**"

John 1:29

What does this mean?

God's people lived under a system of sacrifice for their sin. The temple in Jerusalem, the very place sending all these people out to attempt to trap John in his words was the place of sacrifice for the sins of the people. And through managing their sin, the religious leaders maintained their authority over the people.

To atone for their sins, God's people were commanded to sacrifice a perfect lamb, placing their hands on it to transfer their sins to the innocent lamb—before the priest slaughtered it. The streets around the temple in Jerusalem ran red with the blood of sheep and goats, sacrificed to make atonement for the sin of the people. Managing the sins of God's people gave the religious leaders

authority, clout and influence. It made them rich and powerful. It established their families as elite for generations.

And John said all this is coming to an end. John said the one who will shut down your business is here.

All the religious leaders and certainly John himself were familiar with the then 700 year-old prophecy of Isaiah which spoke about someone who was to come commonly known as the Suffering Servant:

**But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 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.**

Isaiah 53:5-7

And John said—that Lamb is here. The One who will bear our chastisement, bring us peace, heal our wounds, and carry our transgressions and crimes in His broken body is now with us. The one who will manage our sin is here.

And John pointed right at Him.

(Insert Ishenheim Picture)

I once heard a Jewish man who became a Christian share his testimony and he said that his parents ripped Isaiah 53 out of his Hebrew Bible, what we know as the Old Testament, because they did not want to him to read it and connect it to Jesus of Nazareth because it would upend everything they believed. When we allow Jesus to manage our sin, when we make Him our authority, it changes everything about our life.

And John knew this.

He had known the Lamb of God his entire life. And he had known his entire life was intended to point to Him.

Do you know Him? Do you know the Lamb of God? Jesus?

If this morning you struggle with managing your sin. If there is sin in your life that you even struggle to name because it causes you such pain and guilt, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is here.

Would you let Him take that sin? Would you give it up? Would you let Him have the authority in your life to simply handle whatever it is?

There is no sin for which the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world cannot make atonement. There is no one He cannot set right.

So be set free and allow Jesus to be your authority.

Place Him on the throne of your life.