

This morning, I am beginning a new sermon series that I am calling “Meeting Jesus.” Throughout this summer, we will be looking through the gospel of John at various interactions that people had with Jesus in order to learn about Jesus and about ourselves. My hope and prayer is that as we look at these stories, that you will grow in your faith in and love for Jesus and that you would know better what it means to know and follow God.

This morning, we are going to begin with a man who is commonly known as John the Baptist, the first person who interacts with Jesus in this gospel. John the Baptist is not the same person as the John who wrote the book. The one who wrote the book was most likely one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, or else an early church leader named John. Let’s begin by reading John 1:1-18, a passage where we first meet John, and also learn a lot about Jesus:

***John 1:1-18** - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" ¹⁶ From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

There is a lot we could talk about in this section, but I want to begin by focusing on John’s description of who John the Baptist was and what his role was:

⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.

What is John's primary calling, his main responsibility, according to John? He writes that John came as a witness testifying about Jesus, the light of the world. When you hear the words witness and testifying, I would imagine for most of you it brings to mind the courtroom. The basic role of the witness is to tell the court what he or she saw, so that the judge or jury can render a verdict. John is described here as a witness telling people about Jesus, the light of the world, the Word of God. And John evidently saw himself as a witness too. Listen to how he describes himself in a couple later passages:

¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." ²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

He is not the Christ, the Messiah, but instead has been sent by God to prepare the way for the Lord. And:

John 3:22-30 - *After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. ²³ Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. ²⁴ (This was before John was put in prison.) ²⁵ An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. ²⁶ They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan-- the one you testified about-- well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." ²⁷ To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' ²⁹ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.*

How did John understand himself? Look at the language he uses: In the first section, John quotes the Old Testament prophet Isaiah to say that he is a voice

calling in the desert, telling people to prepare themselves for the coming of God. And in John 3, he compares himself the friend of the groom, or the best man. What a great analogy. In other words, John knew that he was not meant to be the center of attention, just as the best man or maid of honor should not be the center of attention at a wedding. He was not the main attraction. He is there to bring the bride – God’s people – and the bridegroom – Jesus – together; that this is his calling and joy. And John ends this section by saying these incredible words: **He must become greater; I must become less.** He must occupy center stage; I must not steal His spotlight.

So, John was a witness testifying to Jesus. He came to prepare people for the coming of Jesus, to call people to repent of their sins and to prepare for the Messiah, the one sent by God to save His people. He understood his place as the witness, the friend of the groom, the one whose calling and joy was to shine the spotlight on Jesus so that others might believe in and follow Him.

So, if John was a witness testifying to Jesus, **what specifically was he testifying to?** Who is this Jesus, according to these passages? Four things we learn in particular:

1) Jesus is God in human form

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

The Word, or Logos in the Greek, is the ultimate self-expression of God in creation, revelation and salvation. It is distinct from the Father, but it the perfect self-expression of the Father. The word Logos was also a word that John’s Greek audience would have been familiar with, as the logos in Greek philosophy was seen as the meaning or rationale behind the universe. From the very first verse, the John who writes this book is declaring that Jesus is no ordinary human, but is God in human form. As C.K. Barrett writes in his commentary on John, “John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous.” Indeed – the things we hear Jesus say are so extreme that He is either God in human form or delusional.

In addition to John the author of this book, John the Baptist also testifies that Jesus is God in human form. Listen to a few more passages:

¹⁵ John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am **the voice** of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

³⁴ **I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.**"

The testimony of John's gospel and of John the Baptist is that this Jesus is no ordinary person. This is the Lord Himself in human form. This is the eternal Word of God, God the One and Only, who for all eternity has been at the Father's side. Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

He is not just a good teacher. As C.S. Lewis put it, "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a moral teacher, but I don't accept the claim that he is God.' That is the one thing we must never say. A man who is merely a man and said the things Jesus said can not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic, on the level of the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You can shut him up as a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, you may fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about him being a great moral teacher. He did not leave that open to us, and he did not intend to."

Do you trust in Jesus as Lord? If you doubt his divinity, read John's gospel and consider the testimony yourself.

2) Jesus is the light of the world who gives us spiritual sight

In v. 4, John compares Jesus to light in the darkness:

⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a **witness** to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a **witness** to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

Think of what light does – illuminating the world so that you can see instead of going around blindly in the darkness. This is what Jesus does for us through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'

Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. When we believe in Him, one of the things He does is that He gives us the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, to be God inside of us, to give us the ability to know God and understand the things of the Spirit. As Paul put it:

***Ephesians 1:17-19** - I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*

When I came to faith, I saw things differently. Do you have the Holy Spirit? Have you been given spiritual sight? Ask Him to give you His Holy Spirit.

3) Jesus gives people the right to become children of God

¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

When we come to faith in Jesus, the eternal Son of God, we are not only given His Holy Spirit, regenerating our hearts and giving us spiritual sight, but we are also adopted as children of God. We can know God as Father, with the full rights of sons. We can relate to God as beloved children to a loving Father. How do you see God? Do you know God that way?

4) Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away our sins

John 3:29-31, 36 - *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."*

John testifies that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and that your eternal destiny depends upon whether or not you receive or reject this. Now, John's contemporaries would probably not have understood the allusion the way we do to "the Lamb of God." What does he mean by "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"?

In order to understand what the significance of that statement is, consider the history of the Lamb in the Bible.

- 1) **Abraham, Isaac & the lamb** – In Genesis 22:1-14, Abraham is told by God to sacrifice his son, but in the end God stops him and provides a lamb for the sacrifice. The lamb dies so that Isaac does not have to.
- 2) **Passover Lamb** – In Exodus 12, God brings the people out of slavery in Egypt by instructing them to kill a lamb and to put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts, so that the angel of the Lord would pass over their house and not kill their firstborn son. Once again, a lamb is killed so that they do not have to be killed.
- 3) **Isaiah 53** – Isaiah prophecies about a Messiah figure that would come to die for the sins of the people, and that he would be led like a lamb to slaughter, silent like a sheep before his shearers. Once again, the lamb would die instead of the people.

When John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God, I believe God gave Him spiritual insight in order to testify to the sacrificial death that Jesus would die for the sins of the world as the ultimate Passover Lamb.

1 Peter 1:18-19 - *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 forefathers,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

When we put out faith in Jesus, we are not only regenerated and adopted, but we are also justified. When we believe in Jesus, God declares us not guilty, as if we had never sinned at all.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* ¹⁸ *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:* ¹⁹ *that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.* ²⁰ *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making **his appeal through us.** We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.* ²¹ *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Have you been forgiven? Have you put your faith in Jesus? Jesus is God in human form, the light of the world who gives us spiritual sight, the one who by His life and death gives us the right to become children of God, the lamb of God who takes away our sins.

So what does this mean for us?

We are also called to be witnesses.

Acts 1:4-8 - *On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about."* ⁵ *For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* ⁶ *So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* ⁷ *He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."* ⁸ *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Part of being a witness is testifying to how God has changed our lives. But that is not all. There are many things out there that have brought improvement to people's lives – yoga, p90x, weight-loss surgery, having kids. Yes, he has probably improved your life. But the gospel is not about self-improvement. It is about the eternal Son of God who loves us so much that He lived and died for the sins of the world, that we might be justified, adopted, and regenerated.

He must become greater and we must become less. It is not about you! You are not the center of the universe. You are a witness called to testify to Jesus, the light of the world, the eternal Son of God, the Savior of the world. We can not save anyone, give anyone eternal life, adopt anyone as a child of God. But He can. What does this look like practically for you?

Less boasting in ourselves. Less talking about how awesome we are and more about how awesome He is. Less trusting in our own way and more trusting in Him. Being willing to make ourselves uncomfortable for the sake of others. Being friendlier. Asking people if they have any spiritual background, or what they believe. What will it mean for you to become less and for Him to become greater?

I will be looking for testimonies this summer. Tell your story of meeting Jesus. Tell your story to others. Ask others for their story of meeting Jesus.

God has called us to be witnesses. Pray for opportunities. Pray for those in our lives who don't know Him. Pray for courage and for Him to give us His Words.