

John 1:26-31

John The Witness, And The Meaning Of Christmas

Image Church // Christmas Wk. 4

Introduction

Well, Merry Christmas! I can't believe that it's already Christmas Eve! If you're a guest with us, we're o glad that you're here to celebrate with us...

*This evening we're going to be wrapping up the series we've been in called **Christmas**, where we're looking at the realities surrounding the coming of Christ...*

*Specifically, as it relates to the Christmas characters that played a role in the **inauguration of the very first Christmas**...*

- *So often these people are referenced but rarely examined...*

There's a lot that we can learn from these folks that surrounded the coming of Jesus...

And so what we've been doing is diving into the unique stories of these people and seeing what God is doing to them and through them...

So far we've looked at Mary's Christmas, we've looked at Zechariah and Elizabeth's Christmas, and Joseph's Christmas, and this morning we're going to **John the Witness** as he brings it all together for us highlighting the meaning of Christmas!

Now, there's some things that you need to know about **John**...

John is the son of **Zachariah and Elizabeth**...

Zechariah was a priest in the temple of the Lord, and he and his wife **Elizabeth** had struggled with the pain of infertility for their entire lives...

Well God told them they would have a son, and they were to name **John** and that he would serve a special purpose...

God was setting something up, His provision for Zechariah and Elizabeth in the midst of their **personal brokenness** was a foretaste of the ultimate provision to come for the brokenness of the world...

See, God's **immediate** provision in the lives of *Zechariah and Elizabeth* would be for the purpose of pointing to, and setting up, God's **eternal** provision for the world through **Jesus**...

*What we will see is that **John** plays a key role in God's plan for eternal provision...*

John is also a really unique guy...

Matthew 3:4 says that John [wore] a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

So, think, like a *Mideastern Tom Hanks* toward the end of the movie **Castaway** but with no Wilson, *with a little more Bear Grills swag from the get-go*...

- *My guy's harvesting honey from legit bee hives reach-and-go style!*

Showers were probably not a thing for him, and he probably had remnants of honey in his beard and his breath would have smelled like locus... Not sure what that smells like so I will leave that to your imagination...

Most likely he would have been poor given what we know about his diet and the fact that he was kind of like a nomad, which means that he probably didn't graduate at the top of his class, he wasn't a scholar, he didn't have political power...

I say that because what you need to understand is that John wasn't a really impressive guy... Especially by the world's standards...

Some of the most significant people in the Bible were the least and most insignificant people, people that would have been picked last for a lot of things in society, and yet they are the very people that God choose to use...

Adrian Rodgers example... (not the quarterback- a preacher)

- First in your class- stand up... Captain of your sports team- stand up... If you earned a scholarship,
- And he went through a list of all of these different areas of success...
- And then he said, I want you to take a look around... The people standing, God *can* use you and He will but you most likely won't be the first...

One of the things that you need to see from this story is that **God loves using unimpressive people**, unaccomplished, normal, and below-average people because in doing that he gets the most glory, because it is not about the ability of the person, it is about the ability of God...

- When God uses unexpected people, it puts His power on display...

God could have made John anything He wanted him to be, successful, powerful, a king, a war hero, a political figure, *but God choose to use a guy that wore an old camel hair coat and ate honey and locust...*

So if you're here this morning and you have doubted God's ability to use you, if you feel like you don't have a lot to offer, or that you don't have the skill set...

- You're exactly who God wants to use!
- It's not about your ability, it's about His ability!

Alright, so, let's look at John's big moment... We're going to be in John 1... Now, a quick distinction, **The Gospel of John**, or the *Book of John*, was written by the **apostle John**- who was one of the 12 disciples...

Well in **chapter 1** he's going to introduce us to *our John* who's often referred to as **John the Baptist**... But I think **John the Witness is more fitting**...

- **Verses 6 & 7**, says that: **There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify about the light**...
 - There's **fourteen** other times in **The Gospel of John** that the word **witness** is connected with John.¹
- John does more than baptize people...
 - *Plus, for those of you who are recovering Baptists it'll make you feel better...*

Alright so here's what's going on... **John the witness** has caused a big stir... So, much so, that the religious leaders send out some guys to find out what's happening (verses 19-22).

So, they come up to **John the Witness** and are like *Hey man who the heck are you? We got to get to the bottom of this cuz a lot of people are asking about what's going on here...*

And so John says this to them in **verse 23** **"I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, —just as Isaiah the prophet said."**

¹ John Piper, sermon. *John was not the light, but a witness to the light.*

You have to understand that this is a huge moment... what he just said was a huge statement...

Here's why: John the Witness literally quotes a passage from **Isaiah 40:3** that was written some **700 +** years before by a prophet named Isaiah... A bold move to quote scripture and claim it's about you!!

- But he's making an important *God-ordained* connection...

For us to see the significance of this, we have to jump back to the OT...

- One of the things that you'll find when you read **The Gospel of John** (or the book of John) is that it is always pointing back to the **OT...**

God created the world in perfect peace and perfect harmony- it was a world without sin. The word for that is **Shalom...**

- Say that word with me **SHALOM...**
 - You need to understand that in SHALOM there was no death, there was no hurt, there was no pain...
 - Lions and alligators didn't attack, nothing stung, bit or hurt Adam and Eve...

It was a world where **Adam** and **Eve** would walk and talk with God in the beautiful garden that he had placed them in...

God gave them free-reign over everything, and they could do whatever they wanted **with the exception of one command that God gave.**

God said there's a tree over there and you're not to eat of it... **Do NOT EAT the FRUIT of that TREE or you will die.**

You would think with all that they had, and with **all** the other trees that they wouldn't even go near that tree. But they did the opposite. Not only did they go near it, but they directly disobeyed God and ate from it, and in that instant sin entered the world.

Sin is an immoral act considered to be a transgression against divine law.

- Adam and Eve broke God's law...

This was detrimental for Adam and Eve and for the world. In that instant, everything changed... Their relationship with God was **severed** and **sin and death have now entered the world** and **Shalom** was no more...

The aftermath of their sin: (explain the effects of each one)

- Broken relationship between man and God
- Broken relationship between man and man
- Broken relationship between man and creation
- Broken relationship between man and self

What was in perfect harmony is now broken and distorted. Creation began to **unravel** at the entrance of sin and evil through the rebellion of Adam and Eve.

Here is what you need to understand: *Everything that God made was and is good, Evil is the privation (absence of something that was supposed to be there) of good, and the good that should be is not there.*²

What should be nothing but good, is now polluted with the rebellion of Adam and Eve... the good that should be, is substituted with the evil that now is...

We see in Scripture the quick implications of this when **Cain kills Able...** Where there should be life, there is now death as a result of sin and evil that is now present in the world... And that was only the start of many things like that to come...

You say: **Why doesn't God just fix all this??**

² Bruce Ashford, Theologian.

Well, watch this!!! In the midst of Adam and Eve's rebellion against Him, when He didn't have to, in **Genesis 3:15** God promises that a **Deliverer** is going to come to **defeat** sin and death...

And then in **Genesis 3:21**, God does something incredibly interesting... He kills an animal to provide clothes to **cover** Adam and Eve in the midst of their sin...

See, after they ate of the tree that God told them not to eat from their innocence was gone and they realized that they were naked... And so, they ran and grabbed some fig leaves and made clothes for themselves...

*Now, I know you're wondering, **how they were they just figuring that out**... Well, there was a purity and an innocence about them before they sinned...

- It's kind of like when your kids are really young and they run around necked without a care in the world, and people think it's cute...
- Verses when they get older- *No grown man or woman this Christmas in front of the whole family is going to strip down necked and start running around the house...*

WHY?! Because there's an awareness that happens when you realize: *"It's not ok to run around necked" ... now granted, that awareness came a little later for some of you, but you get the point!*

See, **the fig leaves**, were Adam and Eve's attempt to fix the problem on their own...

- Which is a lot like **religion** teaches today- follow the rules, be good, be a better person... Those are all personal attempts to fix the problem, and people try over and over again to do the right thing, to be better, and to follow the rules but they can't...

Like religion, the fig leaves won't work because the leaves would eventually rot and wither, bringing them right back to the same problem... The fig leaves were Adam and Eve's failed attempt to try to fix the problem, but it won't work because the fig leaves won't last...

What we see is that Only God could provide the **covering** that they needed, a covering that would last, but it came through the death of an animal. **Something had to die in order for Adam and Eve to be covered**...

What God did was a **foreshadowing** of what would happen through the deliverer that God promised would come...

Then the prophet **Isaiah** would come years later and remind the people of God's promised deliverer, and he would paint a picture of what the coming of that deliverer would be like and he would say in **Isaiah 40:3**:

- *There will be* **A voice of one crying out: Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert.**

So, when **John the Witness** declares who he is to the religious leaders by quoting directly from the prophet Isaiah, he's fulfilling what God said would happen, and he's pointing to the reality of the arrival of the deliverer! *That what God said was coming is happening now!!*

Incredible! God set this whole thing up in a way that no one else would script it out, but this is why He's God and we're not!

- *Old couple, weird kid...*

God was faithfully working to bring together His plan of redemption- **the same God that was faithfully working to bring about your salvation is the same God working in your situation**.

- It may not be how you would script it but His plan is better than your plan, you can trust that he's faithful in the midst of it all even if it doesn't seem like it!

You can trust God's faithfulness in the future because you can look back at God's faithfulness in the past! The same God that was working then is the same God working now!

Now, real quick, let me stop right here and talk to the Christians in the room... **Do you see how God intentionally uses John for the purpose of fulfilling His plan??**

Let me ask you this: *Do you understand that God wants to intentionally use you in His plan??*

Listen, like John, God's called you to be a witness- to announce the good news of Jesus to a lost and dying world...

- **Matthew 28:19** is clear on that...

Do you recognize that in the same way that John's about to introduce Jesus to the world, God has called you to introduce Jesus to the world?

- **2 Corinthians 5:17**... Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old is gone the new has come.... And then in light of that...
 - **2 Corinthians 5:20:** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.

Do you see that like John you have been given a responsibility?

- **When you believe the message of God, you become part of the mission of God**... You can't separate the two!

Alright, let's pick back up in verse 26...

[John the Witness says]: **26** "I baptize with water," John answered them. "Someone stands among you, but you don't know him. **27** He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie." **28** All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Let me explain what's happening here... **Acts 19:4** says that: *John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Jesus.*

John's baptism is about the recognition of sin and of the need for the one to come, who they don't know yet... *Perfect set up for what's about to happen...*

Look at **verse 29**...

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! **30** This is the one I told you about: 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.' **31** I didn't know him, but I came baptizing with water so he might be revealed to Israel."

As Jesus came waking toward John the Witness, *John The Witness* yells out: *There HE is!! That's the deliverer, that's the one I have told you about!!*

Notice what he says about Jesus: **Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**

- Now, **WHY** does he call him that??? The **Lamb of God**? Could have said something different...

Think back to **Adam** and **Eve**, remember how God killed an animal to cover them...

Well from then on, **a sacrificial system would be put in place as a reminder**

- The people would raise a lamb up in their home, and then they would take it out and put it on an altar...
- Lay their hands on it as a symbol of their sin being put on this innocent lamb, and then they would kill it...

Death was a consequence of sin, so something had to die in order to pay for the sins that had been committed... the lamb was a substituted offering...

But what you see is a picture of the **innocent** taking on the sins of the guilty... the innocent being slain for the **guilty!**

Everything in the **OT System** was designed to remind the people of their sin and separation from God, and their desperate need for God's grace and intervention...

So, in John the Witness's declaration, he's saying that God's ultimate intervention has come, that Jesus was the promised deliverer and He was here to take away the sins of the world...

Like the Lamb Jesus would be the innocent one slain for the guilty, except He would be the final substitute offering once and for all...

- There would be no need for animal sacrifices...

See, Jesus would come and live the perfect life that we never could have—and then He would be slaughtered as the perfect sacrifice—giving His life in place of ours!

- Justice was served in Jesus' death- His death was payment for our sin... Jesus took our place...
- Then He would beat death- raising from the grave proving that He was God and offering us new life in Him!

But listen, there is something that we have to see in all of this... John recognized Jesus, but you know who didn't (*and we see this all the way through the book of John*)

Almost every one of the **RELIGIOUS** leaders missed it! Which is crazy, because they were the ones that should have seen it coming but they missed it! They missed Jesus!!

Do you know why?! **Because for them it was more about religion than the rescuer...**

- They were more concerned about the acts of religion than the one who would come and act for them!

See, religion says to follow all the rules and rituals, and make sure that you're doing the best you can to live right... check all the boxes every week.

- Go to church, say a prayer before your meal, and "Thank the man upstairs" when something good happens...

Here is the problem with that, religion is just something that's part of your life, it's something that you claim... but it doesn't define your life...

Religion leaves you tired and empty because you're always trying to do the best you can to live right and you're never really sure if God is happy with you or not...

But the gospel says that in Christ there is nothing that you could ever do to make God love you anymore, and there's nothing you could ever do to make God love you less...

The Hope that God offers isn't something that you wish for or work for, it's something that you receive...

The hope that you need right now isn't in your circumstances it's what's been offered to you through the Savior!

Jesus came into the world to come to save sinners like you and me, to offer us **hope** in the midst of a lost and broken world... **Hope guaranteed** through his blood shed on the cross...

And I don't know where you are with this, or what you have going on in your life, but what you need to hear today is **DON'T MISS THE SAVIOR** who came to rescue you from your sin by offering himself in your place!

Maybe you walked in here today and you're thinking:

- ***But my life's a mess*** - Jesus came to die for that
- ***My marriage is a wreck*** - Jesus came to die for that
- ***I have been running from God for years would He even take me back*** - Jesus came to die to bring you back
- ***I have addictions*** - Jesus came to die for that
- ***The sin in my life is too great*** - Jesus came to die for that
- ***I have no hope*** – Jesus came to die so that you could have hope
- ***I'm hurting*** – Jesus came to die so that one day there will be no more pain and no more tears
- ***I don't feel loved*** - Jesus loved you so much He came to die for you
- ***I don't feel accepted*** - Jesus came to die so that the God of the universe could accept you into his kingdom forever!
- ***You say, you don't know my life-*** I have problems... No I don't but Jesus does and He came to die in order to set you free of your problems- they don't define you Jesus does...
- ***Things haven't turned out the way I wanted-*** Jesus died to give you everything that you need and to offer you hope that this life is not all that there is...

Conclusion [VAMP]

Listen, there are some of you that are hearing this message of hope for the very first time, and you trust in the finished work of Jesus!

- Maybe for you it has been about a religion and not a life-altering relationship with a person.
- Or maybe you have been running from God, looking for hope in all of the wrong places...

There are others of you, that have forgotten the sacrifice of the Savior...

- Maybe you have been clouded with all the things of Christmas, that you've forgotten the meaning of Christmas...

Some of you have been caught in the religious cycle...

You don't have to be defined by what you've done...

Illustration: Listen, *Christmas is all about the tree, it always has been about a tree even from the very foundation of the world.*

But it's not the tree that most people think about around this time of year. It's a different tree...

It's not the tree in the den that you decorate, it's a tree on the hill of execution...

And from the first breath that Jesus took, he was walking toward that tree. Every step He would take would be walking to the cross.

*Jesus knew when He came to earth that the cross was his destiny. It was the only way that what was broken in the garden with **Adam** and **Eve** could be restored...*

In this Christmas season, you can't lose sight of the sacrifice that would come from the baby that we celebrate...

Christmas is a story that leads us to a tree- You need to be reminded of the tree that Jesus came to hang on for your sin and my sin, to satisfy God's requirements so that we could be saved and restored!³

The meaning of Christmas is bigger than just a baby in a manger, it's who that baby was and what He came to do!

Pray

Candle lighting [VAMPING]

John 8:12 Jesus says: I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.

³ Adapted, some language taken from Paul David Tripp: *Make the most of your Christmas tree.*

Outtake:

We're going to respond together by remembering that tree through the taking of Communion together...

This is a physical reminder that God's given His church as a reminder of why Jesus came... To be the Lamb of God...

Communion

Fence the table

For some of you, ***you don't need to take the elements, you need what the elements represent...***

And here's what we want to do during this time... After you receive the elements, I want you just to sit and reflect on the sacrifice of the Savior, whose birth we're celebrating...

I want you to consider how God is leading you to respond this morning... For some of you, this is the time when you need to trust in Jesus for the first time... For others, you need to refocus your heart...

You come and let's receive the elements together....

Come back and take the elements

- ***bread then cup...***