

Living Life Alive
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Scripture Reading: John 1:19-34

¹⁹ This was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He came right out and said, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹ "Well then, who are you?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?" "No," he replied. "Are you the Prophet we are expecting?" "No." ²² "Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?" ²³ John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "I am a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Clear the way for the LORD's coming!' " ²⁴ Then the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ asked him, "If you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?" ²⁶ John told them, "I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. ²⁷ Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal." ²⁸ This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing. 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! ³⁰ He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.' ³¹ I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. ³³ I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God."

Good morning church! How was your week? This week my mind and heart have been taken back to Psalm 23. David's picture of the Lord being our shepherd is so applicable in this time.

And for me, as I walk through some of my own time in the valley of shadows, the knowledge that I can have God guiding me, and providing for me, and protecting me makes all the difference.

It is so amazing that the God who needs to, and is able to manage all of the earth and all its people would care so much for me. Centuries later, after David wrote that Psalm, Jesus would let us know that He was the good Shepherd that would watch over the lives of all those who would trust in Him.

If you are ready to stop trying to control everything and everyone around you to make things work out for your good, you will find an incredible peace in having God work out all those things for good. He does a much better job, and with much less worry and trouble on our part.

This was the choice David made when he said, "The Lord is my shepherd". This is the choice I have made and can witness to the combination of God's infinite love and infinite power being what I need for peace and strength each day. God also supplies us with all the hope we need that light will come to us after the darkness. He never fails us.

Today, in our time in the Word of God, we will be looking at the section of John chapter one that was read for us. It tells about the work of a man named "John the Baptist".

And “no” that does not mean he started or attended a “Baptist” church. He wasn’t that kind of Baptist. It would be about 1,600 years after John lived that someone started a church by that name that became a denomination.

Last Sunday, in the verses that Pastor Adam spoke about, John, the apostle, had written about John the Baptist the following . . .

John 1:6-8

⁶ God sent a man, John the Baptist, ⁷ to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. ⁸ John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light.

John the Baptist had the privilege and responsibility of announcing the arrival of Jesus, the Son of God. He would serve as a witness to the One who would be the light of the world.

Who was this John the Baptist? His story starts with the angel Gabriel telling John’s father, Zechariah that he would be born and that he would grow to be a great man, like the prophet Elijah. (Luke chapter 1)

He would be one that from birth God would reside in by the Holy Spirit. Gabriel prophesied John’s ministry would have a great impact and that many people would turn back to a relationship with God because of his preaching.

And John did grow up to be the fiery preacher, dressed in coarse camel hair, standing in the Jordan River - calling out for people to repent of their sins, to turn to God and to be baptized. (Matthew chapter 3)

His fire and passion for righteousness landed him in trouble with King Herod when John confronted Herod about his immoral lifestyle. (Matthew chapter 14)

It was Herod, who after imprisoning John, would one day give the order for him to be executed. That’s how the Baptist’s voice was silenced when he was barely 30 years old, but not before He had completed God’s call to be the One to announce that the world’s Savior had arrived.

Let’s go back to John chapter 1 and verse 19 and take a look at that. Got your Bibles open?

John 1:19

¹⁹ This was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants from Jerusalem to ask John, “Who are you?”

John the Baptist had been gathering crowds of people. The gospel writer, Mark, tells us that all the people of Jerusalem and all those from the surrounding area of Judah were trekking out to the Jordan River to go see this wild-man preacher they were hearing about.

Many were walking 70 km. round trip, with others traveling closer to 80-85 km. across desert terrain to get a look at the baptizer. And when a preacher rises to that kind of notoriety among the people of Jerusalem the religious officials take notice and they start to get concerned.

A band of temple workers were dispatched from Jerusalem to go find out who this guy is, or at least to ask him, “who do you think you are?”

They peppered John with questions to try to nail down where he thought he got the authority from to baptize people and tell them what God wants them to do. They asked him . . . “Do you think you are the great prophet that is to come or the second coming of Elijah?”

John wouldn't accept any of their titles and told them very clearly that he was not the Messiah, God's chosen Savior. When John quoted an Old Testament verse about being a voice in the wilderness preparing for the arrival of the Lord the interrogators weren't satisfied.

These men were on a mission, and far be it from them to travel back the 35 km. with nothing satisfying to tell their bosses. So, they pressed John to tell them something they could take back with them.

Verse 24-27

John 1:24-27

²⁴ Then the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ asked him, “If you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?” ²⁶ John told them, “I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. ²⁷ Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal.”

I'm pretty sure John's answer wasn't what they were after, but he let them know that he was not the One they needed to find out about. He was just doing his job to announce the arrival of the One they should really be interested in.

Somewhere, in the crowd on the banks of the Jordan River was One who John considered himself unworthy of being His servant, unworthy of being the one charged with removing his sandals and washing His feet.

The Scripture tells us it wasn't until the following day that John the Baptist pointed Jesus out in the crowd, even though it appears he could have done it that day, while the religious leaders were demanding that John explain himself.

The next day when he directs the crowd's attention to Jesus, he tells them that he had already baptized Jesus and become aware of who he was. Verse 32-34

John 1:32-34

³² Then John testified, “I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. ³³ I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.”

The sign that had been given to him to be able to identify God's chosen Savior, had already taken place. God's Holy Spirit, having taken on a physical form that John would be able to recognize, had settled on Jesus at the moment of His baptism.

There would be a right moment to reveal to the people – the ones that happened to be in the crowd that day – that the one who would rescue their lives from death to bring them into life had arrived.

It was a special day of revelation of truth that God orchestrated, through John the Baptist, for those people, on that day. How fortunate they were.

How fortunate you are - if you are given moments when God speaks to you about who He is, or of His grace available to you, or when you get a fresh understanding of your need for God's help. Do not miss those opportunities when God shows up, like He did at the Jordan River that day.

We can all too quickly rush back into our busyness and concerns of life and we don't stop and listen to God telling us about things far more important than our jobs, or our hobbies, or even about all our other relationships. As the Lord, Himself said,

Mark 8:36

³⁶ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?

We know that by the time of Jesus' crucifixion, the majority of the crowd had let slip from away from them the opportunity that was theirs to follow Jesus and to receive from Him the gift of restored life in all the Creator's intended completeness and fullness. And He had been standing, right, there!

Do not miss the moments when God reveals His Son to you. Do not turn away from Jesus, but move closer. Get a better look. Put yourself closer, so that you will hear even more of what He has for you.

In verse 31, John explained that in pointing to Jesus, he was doing the job assigned to him.

John 1:31

³¹ I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.

He was to prepare people to meet Jesus. That is also the calling of God on my life as a pastor, pointing people to Jesus. And each in unique ways - all of us who are followers of Jesus are called to this same mission. As John did, we are to point people to Jesus.

As we say "yes" to allowing God to involve us in what He is doing in His world, He will allow us to be the very voices that offer moments of opportunity for others to meet the Lord.

I would like to look lastly, today, at verse 29, John's own words of introduction of the Lord to the crowd by the river.

John 1:29

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 this passage of Scripture, John refers to Jesus being the Messiah, and the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He calls him the Lord, and the chosen One of God, and says that he will be someone great.

And all those titles and descriptions fit so neatly together with the One who is God come in human form. Other words would also have fit like, King or the Almighty.

But "Lamb of God who takes away sin" would certainly have caught the people off guard. It would not be strange to them that a lamb would be linked with taking away sin.

From the time they were little children they were told by their parents that to atone for sins, the sacrifice of a lamb must be made. Along with the sacrifices made at the temple, every year each family would prepare a chosen lamb for the Passover meal as they celebrated God's rescue of His people.

It is in pointing to a person, and not just any person, but God's chosen rescuer, sent from Him - that the incongruity of the title "Lamb of God who takes away sin" is felt. Jesus was chosen and marked for giving up His life to remove from us our sins that cut us off from God.

When we finish reading the whole story of the gospel, we see that His death would come about by the rejection of those He came to rescue. The very ones He had created in the first place.

What kind of Creator would give such freedom to their creation to choose to accept or to reject them? What kind of Creator would give such power to their creation that it could bring about their own death?

God. God did that. God, in Jesus came into the world making Himself completely vulnerable to rejection and dying at the hands of His creation, so that He could demonstrate His love for us and rescue us at the same time.

Today, as I have this opportunity to point people to Jesus, I only echo John's words . . . "Look, the Lamb of God who takes the sin of the world".

(Prayer of response)