

December 21, 2025 — John 1:19-34 — "Somethin' about this Lamb"

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- [0 : 00] Please turn to John chapter 1, verses 19 through 34. And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who are you? He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, what then? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the prophet? And he answered, no. 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. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, then why are you baptizing if you are neither the Christ nor Elijah nor the prophet? John answered them, I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know.
- [1 : 14] Even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. 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 reigns 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. This is God's word. Thanks be to God. As we look into John chapter 1 verse 19 all the way to 34, it's really interesting, because if you think about what's going on, it's like there's a whole lot of activity in the passage and a lot of ignorance in the passage.
- [2 : 43] Living in Ohio, I don't think you have to live here for more than five minutes to know that the unofficial state flower is in the shape of an orange cone, right? You're driving to work like this into this flurry of sudden activity, and all of a sudden just your average drive, you take a sip of coffee, and then boom, cones. There they are. Miles of cones. No warnings. And the funniest thing, there's no visible crew in sight. You're looking around. It looks like things are very productive, right? There's lanes closed, miles of cones, speed reductions, and not a single shovel in sight. Right? After a while, you kind of just say, well, instead of wondering what they're building, you kind of just go with the flow. You sigh, you merge, and just say, well, I hope for the best. Hopefully this is done before Christmas. And you see, the strangest part is that sometimes, despite what we see going on, and the flurry of activity going on, there is actual work behind the scenes.

[4 : 05] We just can't see it yet. For Youngstown, it takes a long time to see that. But there is work going on.

But at other times, it feels like the cones are honestly just testing our sanctification, right? And the text today exposes a similar problem.

It's possible to live in the middle of activity without understanding the purpose of that activity. To be surrounded by signs going on that something is happening, clearly something is happening, while having no idea what is actually being built.

Today in the passage, thank you for reading it, Emily, the crowds are standing knee-deep in water in the Jordan.

Repentance is coming out of John the Baptist's mouth, and the Messiah, Jesus, is present among them.

[5 : 16] And still, many are asking, who are you? And what are you doing? In this flurry of activity. God was acting decisively in history here in John.

Decisively. But the significance was somehow missed by those closest around. This is the tension of the passage.

That proximity to God's activity does not guarantee perception of its purpose. Being around the activity does not guarantee perspective of that purpose.

The passage today, I've been going with a similar theme throughout this series, and this sermon title is Something About This Lamb.

Something About This Lamb. And what I have, I've tried to break this out in chunks that I believe will be the most helpful to get the point across to us.

[6 : 27] But there is three sections. And I want us to see a single main point developing throughout this passage within these three sections.

And that's simply, Behold the Lamb and believe. It's an imperative for us today. Behold the Lamb and believe.

Let's pray as we dive in. Father, thank you for your word today. Thank you for giving it to us and revealing yourself to us.

We don't deserve it. We don't deserve revelation. We don't deserve your grace and kindness. But still you give it to us. Father, we turn to your word.

And we come into this mystery of proximity and perception. And we ask for you to help us to understand in our own lives where we're missing it as well.

[7 : 28] Praise in Jesus' name. Amen. I heard grumbles. I don't know if I heard an amen. Amen. Amen. It's like... The first section I have today is looking at verse 19 to 28.

And that's seeing love. Going with the Advent theme. Love that comes near before it's known. Love that comes near before it's known. Look in your Bibles in verse 18.

The author, the apostle John, who wrote this gospel, the gospel of John, tells us plainly. And this is the testimony in verse 19. This is the testimony of John.

When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you? Well, John's response here is striking and deliberate.

He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ. The language here is very forced.

[8 : 38] He confessed and did not deny, but confessed. It's like a left hook and a right hook. He is not the Christ. The double-down denial.

This denial carried significant weight. I'm not here to give you a history lesson, but to understand how history actually informs this passage. In the first century world, claiming to be the Messiah was nothing relating to theology or theological significance, to be the Messiah.

It was actually very political in this culture. As a messianic hope was bound up to national liberation. This nation just came through a Maccabean period of history.

And they had this idea of liberation still on their mind as the Roman government was still their boss, this nation.

And this Maccabean period wasn't too far of a stretch of their imagination. It was literally just recent history. A time when the temple was cleansed of pagan worship.

[9 : 48] A time when Hellenization was discarded and cleansed from the temple. And Jewish rule was established and restored. And this claim of being the Messiah here would have possibly led to another revolt.

God would once again raise up a deliverer like in the Maccabean revolt. And so this question was political. And I think that's what we need to understand here.

It was motivated by politics. Are you Judas Maccabeus to lead us again? Are you the successor? And one careless sentence by John the Baptist could have ignited rebellion and invited Roman violence.

Because his following was so great in this time period. And so the delegation presses further with these scribes and Levites here in this setting of the Jordan.

They say, are you Elijah? He says, I'm not. Are you the prophet? He says, no. And frustrated, they demanded, who are you?

[10 : 58] And what do you say about yourself? It's like a traffic stop. License and registration, please. How many of you all heard that once or twice? Maybe this morning.

But John answers by quoting Isaiah. He said in verse 23, I am the voice. Not the Messiah. I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.

Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said. In other words, John is preparing the world as Isaiah was in his day for God's coming.

For God's restoration. This kind of sounds like political liberation, if that's your motive and presupposition. And John refuses to every recognized title.

Elijah, the prophet. Who are you? And so the question, it stops from being theological or political. It actually gets territorial now.

[12 : 05] In verse 24, we receive a little commentary from the author in parentheses. Now, they had been sent from the Pharisees. In verse 25, the author continues.

They asked him, then, why are you baptizing? You're an art turf. You're nobody. If you're neither the Christ nor Elijah or the prophet, why are you baptizing?

You're not authorized. And the author makes this scene filled with a lot of irony. The Pharisees were experts in Scripture.

They were experts of purity and preparation for God's coming. They baptized all the time. They were authorized.

Priests and Levites to interrogate this prophet by Pharisees. Who should have known when God was preparing his people. Even without John the Baptist in this river.

[13 : 16] This Jordan. In other words, the tension builds as these questions are not concerning curiosity. They're actually concerning jurisdiction.

They say, why are you baptizing? You're not authorized to do this type of thing. John answers in a way that they would have not expected.

In verse 26. It says, I baptize with water. But among you stands one you do not know. 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 the Baptist refuses to defend himself.

And he redirects attention. Everything away from his activity. Towards Christ's unknown presence among them. The word about the wrong guy.

[14 : 15] It's very chilling to read these words and consider the weight of them. Among you stands one you do not know.

Considering what we know about the one who stands among them. That's fairly chilling. For scribes. For Levites.

Why? Because their ignorance is resistance. And that was exposed here. It was ignorance.

They lost perception of the song of Moses. As the Israelites were brought through the Red Sea. And they sang a song on the other side of God's deliverance.

These are men who were very familiar with all of those songs. With all of those scriptures. But they lost perspective. The Baptist teaches us that even the holiest people cannot recognize the Savior unless God opens their eyes.

[15 : 25] That's the tension here. Proximity to Jesus is not perception of Jesus. Ignorance can be cured.

It can be cured. But familiarity convinces us that we don't need a cure. That everything's fine. Familiarity kind of says, I know.

I know about that song of Moses. And it kind of becomes numb. It numbs us. Familiarity numbs us to passion. Doesn't it?

We see this everywhere. Maybe it's your job that you once absolutely loved. When you got that acceptance for that job, you jumped for joy. You sang on the way to work.

And now it just has become this routine that you despise. Maybe it's a neighborhood that you've been looking at, but it becomes invisible.

[16 : 29] Maybe for many of us, even marriage can move from joy and intimacy. And familiarity just kind of brings us to a point of autopilot. It's not because of hostility.

There's not like, it's not a response to something, but it's all because of familiarity. You see, the danger is not separation then.

There is a danger from being separated from the truth of God's work in salvation, right? For a non-believer. But isn't there also a danger for people who are close to Jesus?

And he's in their midst. There's a danger in loss of perception. And at this point in the story, the tension is unresolved.

And I can't resolve it at this point yet. We have to feel that tension of the passage. And if familiarity blinds, then the question hanging in the air of the passage is whether God himself will do something to open blind eyes.

[17 : 38] Will he do something? Praise the Lord. John tells us the next day. We see in section two, love that takes away our sin.

We see this from verse 29 to 31. John the Baptist no longer denies. He declares here in verse 29. He saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

With one sentence, John the Baptist reaches way back through Israel's history to Abraham and Isaac to the Passover lamb, to Isaiah's servant led like a lamb to a slaughter.

And here John the Baptist declares, God has provided a lamb among you, not for political rescue, but a deeper problem of sin.

There's something about this lamb here. Something so central to God's plan that scripture has been whispering his name through centuries, through altars, through blood and sacrifice.

[19 : 02] And finally here he steps into view, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

John the Baptist identifies Jesus here as the Lamb of God who takes away his sin. Right? The Jews see him as just a teacher.

A good teacher. In our day-to-day, Islam sees him as just a great prophet. Jehovah's Witnesses see him as just a created being.

Mormons see him as just an exalted man. Universalists, our neighbors around the corner here, see him as just a moral teacher. Just a moral teacher.

But not John. No, there's no indication here that Jesus is anything upon a linear plane.

[20 : 06] He is set apart. He is supreme. This one standing out and being called out from the crowd is one who stands between God, a holy God, and sinful man who takes away the sin of the world.

The Lamb of God. In fact, no other systems of belief require a Lamb. Right?

Islam doesn't require a Lamb. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, they don't require a Lamb. And if sin is real, if sin is a problem, a teacher, prophet, or man is simply not enough.

There is no hope in that. And so John the Baptist makes this distinction here. He says in verse 30, 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 we should find it interesting and a little bit confusing.

[21 : 22] We talked in our little sermon prep group earlier this week about the oddity that even John the Baptist says that he didn't know him. We're just like, wait.

Okay, the Pharisees didn't know him, but John the Baptist, he's pulled into this mystery. But we should see a distinction here with what he says. Notice that he says, I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed to Israel.

And so John's ignorance, he was ignorant, but he was awaiting revelation. He desired revelation. The Pharisees, their ignorance actually resisted it.

They wanted things to stay the way that they were. In other words, John's ignorance was awaiting God's disclosure. The religious leaders' ignorance was resistant against God's disclosure.

And there's something about this lamb. Something about this lamb. Something confrontational as this lamb steps out from among the crowd. Something that requires humility that John the Baptist seemed to be doing well at, where the Pharisees were just drowned in their pride.

[22 : 46] Something that requires humility. Maybe we should find it interesting that the lamb exposes our need before he ever meets it.

Right? Isn't this true of all real confrontation? Until we humble ourselves. You ever been in a confrontation with someone? Things are only going to escalate if you just stay in your position, hard-headed, stone-hearted.

It takes somebody to say, listen, all right, I could be wrong. I probably did this or did that, but I want to figure this out. Right? Confrontation requires humility.

Until we humble ourselves, we can't actually see what is being revealed to us. We can't actually come to grips with a solution. Without humility, confrontation only escalates.

Y'all seen escalating confrontation? Come on, we just got through Thanksgiving. We know this well. You know, crazy uncle, this politics. See, to behold Jesus requires letting go of the illusion that we can save ourselves.

[23 : 58] To behold Jesus means that we have to let go of the illusion that we can save ourselves. That takes humility.

Confrontation. Or maybe, maybe you understand that, but there's also a side of you that says, well, these are more manageable parts of my life where, yeah, there's a little bit of sin, but it's minor, and I can take care of that.

Right? You know, I'm a sinner, saved by grace, no one perfect, and everything like that. And so, even, even these smaller areas where sin is sort of pleasurable, but seems fairly innocent and controllable in our lives.

Maybe we have to ask ourselves a question. If God has taken care of, like, the big picture, like, your soul, He saved your soul, but your life is unrepentant of different areas and things that you're just like, eh, it's not hurting anyone.

It's just a little bit of sin here and there. I want to ask you, if God removed our most conspicuous sins, would we be sad about that?

[25 : 22] If God would remove those small, minor, inconspicuous sins in our lives, would we be sad about it? We'd be upset because we wouldn't have the pleasure that we once had, the fun that we once justified.

behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Lamb doesn't just divide our lives from these sacred chunks to these minor manageable details.

We must admit every part of our lives need saving. Every part. Whole surrender. But how can we be sure?

How can we be sure that we're not just falling for some spoof of an account and a record? Well, if we could just take John the Baptist's word for it, it would save us a lot of trouble to just believe him and receive Christ.

But God, in his mercy, chose to give the world proof of his plan in this Lamb.

[26 : 44] And we see that in verse 32 through 34. If you can just click the next slide, section 3. We see love that God makes certain.

We see that from verse 32 to 34. John now explains how he knows this is true. John knows this is true. He says, in verse 32, I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and it remained on him.

This Baptist testifies that he saw an eyewitness account of something spectacular, something extraordinary occur.

The Spirit descended from heaven. Somehow it looked like a dove. God only knows what it actually looked like. And it remained on Jesus.

And John the Baptist again reiterates his own ignorance in verse 33. 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.

[28 : 07] And I have seen and I have borne witness that this is the Son of God. John the Baptist tells us, I have seen and I have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

You know, we're crazy every now and then, aren't we? We ask God for signs, we throw out our prayer cloth, right? Just asking God, okay, give me a sign.

You know, you're going through something in life, you're just like, give me something here, come on, Lord. Well, here it is, guys. Here's the sign. This is, in fact, beyond a shadow of a doubt, Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

It was seen. It was heard. Now, some brothers and sisters around us prescribe this as like some second baptism that you receive somewhere in the span of sequence of salvation, things like that.

This is not a sequence, like, well, you get baptized with water and then later, if the Lord gives you the Holy Spirit, you'll start speaking in tongues and babbling like that. Now, I didn't know this passage was anything about teaching doctrine.

[29 : 30] I thought it was about revealing the Son of God and for some reason, context escapes some denominations and religion. But we should see here a contrast, right?

John is contrasting in this passage up to this point, between John is not the Messiah, here's the Messiah. He's not the guy, that's the guy. Not my baptism, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Something greater that Jesus Christ is going to usher in. Not a sequence of events, but a contrast in baptisms. And some also read this as like, you know, this is when Jesus got his upgrade, got the hemi.

Jesus becomes divine when the Spirit comes here, right? Like, he was just a fallen man before that, but here, the Lord came down like a dove, and it was spectacular, and all of a sudden, he's God and man.

But that's an old error called adoptionism. It's a heresy. We can't let John the Baptist's context miss point here.

[30 : 45] Jesus is already the eternal word made flesh in John, in the previous verses, and John has already said that he was before him. So there's something that existed that came into recognition here in this passage.

And so the Spirit's descent is not adoption here. It's a testation of Jesus Christ. Behold the Lamb. This is the Son of God.

It's revealing the Son of God. Not a creation of deity, but confirmation of deity here. There's something about this Lamb indeed. Love revealed to inform our faith.

God has not asked us to believe a testimony without giving us credible evidence to believe it.

God hasn't asked us necessarily. Faith is faith because we don't see. But he has revealed his word to us. He has revealed the good news of the Lamb of God to us.

[31 : 58] Praise the Lord that we have to just believe in the testimony that has been given to us. He didn't leave us without something to believe. He spoke.

He acted. He revealed his Son. Very clear in this passage. There's not much nuance in here. It's very clear. Jesus is the Son of God.

He's the Lamb of God. Fast forward in the Gospel of John, you'll see this Lamb was slaughtered! He was slaughtered upon the cross.

This means the issue is no longer a lack of evidence, but it's actually the posture of our hearts. I think that we stand in our day, maybe here, we're observers, right?

We're in the text, we're looking at a text in the Bible, we're here with it open. And I think believers and unbelievers today need to really listen up.

[33 : 01] those who are here today listening to consider, to evaluate, to admire it all. But sometimes being an unbeliever and also a believer leave us in a place where we never move beyond that belief.

So maybe for an unbeliever, you're sort of skeptical, right? Skeptical of John's testimony as if maybe he made all this up, maybe he ate the wrong mushrooms that day, and all of a sudden he's seeing things, hearing things.

And so you're skeptical. And this whole Bible as authoritative is just a complete sham. It was written and assembled by councils and all sorts of things, and you just want to come up with excuse after excuse after excuse to make it logical to remain in your unbelief.

Skeptic. Well, here's my challenge to you. Before you dismiss John's testimony, ask yourself whether you've actually dealt with what this text claims.

Right? Have you dealt with what this text claims about Jesus Christ? I'm not asking about what you've heard other people say about him.

[34 : 24] At the end of the day, at the end of your life, there will be a time of judgment and accounts for each and every one of us. And it's not going to be a good position to be to say, well, he or she said this, and it was pretty convincing not to believe, or to say, well, my pastor said, you know, living like this wasn't necessarily a sin, and I didn't need to change.

well, we know that this is revealed to us for a purpose to inform our belief. So we just need to behold the Lamb of God and believe.

Every born-again Christian today knows that the reason we believe has nothing to do with the lack of evidence. We got quite a bit of evidence here. We got quite a bit of evidence. It's the implication of the evidence that's presented to us.

Look at this slide. Do the next slide, Zach. It's a big image here. Have you ever seen this image? This is literally how the Word of God, all these little white lines underneath here are books of the Bible and the lengths of the books of the Bible, and all these lines that connect these books of the Bible on this lineal plane are all cross-references to the same act of salvation, plan of redemption, that God has been unfolding to us.

Every born-again Christian today knows that the reason we believe has nothing to do with the lack of evidence, but with the implication of the evidence that's presented to us, we believe.

[36 : 08] Hear the call today. If you are not in Christ, deal with this passage. Let this passage deal with you today and believe in Jesus Christ.

behold the Lamb and believe. You can go ahead and take that thing off. But maybe you're a believer today who has become somewhat of an observer.

You're in Christ, you're saved, you know you're saved, but you've become somewhat of an observer. Those who believe the right things, your doctrine's pretty good, you affirm the gospel, you never deny Jesus Christ, and yet somewhere faith went from dependence upon Jesus to sort of just this distance in relationship or distance in intimacy with him.

Perhaps for you, Jesus has become somewhat someone you believe in to someone you've never actually been trusting in. there hasn't been an ongoing trust in your life being exposed to the world around.

The good news today is that we call that drift, spiritual drift. An author in our midst calls that backsliding. Thank you, Gene, for your book. book. The good news today is that the drift that you may be sensing is not ordained by God to push you into apathy, like woe is me.

[37 : 42] I can never get this right. I'm always a mess up, always a screw up. This drift that you may be sensing is not ordained by God to push you into apathy, but it may be permitted by his grace to pull you back to himself.

The very means to pull you back to himself. To long for the Lord to work once again mightily in your life, to cry out to him.

God does not use drift to abandon us. He uses it as an alarm to awaken us once again to his grace. It's the song of Moses to hear, behold the lamb and believe.

What a two-sided warning of this passage for us. What kind of smell you can taste it? For an unbeliever, if you don't behold, if you're not in Christ and you don't behold today, you won't become.

There's no hope to become righteous, to be saved by your own works. But for a believer, if we stop beholding, we will stop becoming.

[39 : 01] We'll be stagnant, be drifting in our walks. But there is hope. There is hope. As long as we continue to behold him, we will never stop becoming.

We'll never stop becoming. Familiarity only stunts us when it replaces our worship. I pray that that's not so. There's something about this lamb that changes everything.

Something that doesn't just transform our hearts, but it transforms our entire lives. Behold the lamb and believe, church.

Let's pray.