

“The Lamb of God”

John 1:29-34

John 1:29-34 - *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”³⁰ This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’³¹ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.”*

³² And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’³⁴ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

Background Notes

Some background notes will help us understand this section of John’s Gospel. Let’s take a look at the timeline. At first glance, it might appear that the event in these verses took place at the time of the Lord’s baptism, when John saw the Lord Jesus coming to be baptized, and said to the people *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* However, the event in verses 29-31 took place some weeks later.

How do we know that? Look at verse 35: *“Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples.”* Then verse 43 tells us, *“The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, “Follow Me.”* Then in John 2:1 we read, *“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there”* and John 2:11-12 says, *“This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. 12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.”*

The point is, the other gospels tell us that immediately after the Lord Jesus was baptized by John, the Lord went into the Judean wilderness where, after forty days of fasting, He was tested. He didn’t go immediately into Galilee, and He didn’t perform the miracle of the changing of the water into wine right after His baptism. So the event of verses 29-34 occurred some weeks after the Lord’s baptism. The reference to the Lord’s baptism (v32-33) is a reflection by John, looking back to the time when the Lord was baptized.

In verses 31 and 33 John said that he didn’t know the Lord. “Wait a minute,” you might say, “they were cousins! Certainly John the Baptist knew the Lord Jesus!” Well, remember that they didn’t grow up in the same town. John the Baptist grew up in the wilderness, possibly in a Essene-type communities. John may not have known Jesus very well. He may indeed

have only known **about** Him. However, John's comment, "*I did not know Him*" probably means that he didn't know Him as the **Messiah** prior to this time.

Until the Lord Jesus came to be baptized, John didn't realize that his cousin, Jesus, was the promised Messiah. It wasn't Jesus' physical appearance that convinced John that He was the Messiah - no halo or white robe, or anything like that! John says here that it was revealed to him. God had revealed to John who the Messiah would be, and this was confirmed with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Lord Jesus to anoint Him for His ministry. In addition, of course, the confirming statement came from the heavens: "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*"

In reference to the Holy Spirit, verse 32 tells us, "*And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.'*" Today the dove is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, but this was more than a symbol - and yet it wasn't necessarily a real dove. In the parallel passage, in Luke 3:22 we read: "*And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.'*" So the Holy Spirit, on this occasion, took on the appearance of a dove as the Lord Jesus was anointed by the Spirit to begin His public ministry.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Sacrifice is the primary thought in the title, "Lamb of God."

Why did John refer to Jesus Christ as the "Lamb of God"? Was it because the Lord was meek like a lamb? No! The primary thought in the title "Lamb of God" is **sacrifice!**

John was probably thinking of the Old Testament sacrifices, including the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12), which was sacrificed and its blood applied to the home so the first-born would live. John was also probably thinking of Isaiah 53 and its prediction that the Messiah, as a suffering Servant, would be led as a Lamb to the place of sacrifice as a substitute for the people. And then, of course, lambs were brought daily to the Temple in Jerusalem as sacrificial offerings.

John must have had all these sacrifices in mind. In any case, the primary thought in the title "Lamb of God" is **sacrifice**. As the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus was sacrificed for our sins. He was our substitute. Sacrifice is the primary thought in the title "Lamb of God."

2. The work of Christ on the cross was not only for *sins*, but also for *sin*.

Notice what John didn't say in verse 29. He didn't say, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the **sins** of the world." No! He said, the Lamb of God who takes away the **sin** of the world!

Why did He say that? Because the work of Christ on the cross was not only for **sins** (plural), but also for **sin** (singular). When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, He died for all the **sins** that have ever been committed, or ever will be committed

- and He died for the of **whole problem of sin**. We commit sins because we are sinners by nature; sin dwells within us. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, died for our indwelling sin nature as well as our acts of sin.

Furthermore, Romans 8 makes it clear that sin has even affected this material universe. At the present time, according to Romans 8:22, "*the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*" The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross took care of the whole problem of sin. Therefore, in reference to the material universe that has been negatively affected by the sin of mankind, there will be a new heavens and a new earth - because Jesus Christ died for the whole problem of sin! The work of Christ on the cross was not only for **sins**, but also for **sin**.

3. The baptism of the Holy Spirit took place on Pentecost.

Of Jesus Christ, verse 33 says, "*This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.*" To what does this "baptism with the Holy Spirit" refer? We believe that it refers primarily to the event that took place on Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Church (Acts 2).

Up until that day, the Holy Spirit did not **permanently indwell** believers. In John 7:38-39, Jesus said: "*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*" 39 *But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*"

The baptism of the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost. When you become a Christian, you are brought into the Church and into the baptism of the Spirit, because the Church was baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "*For by one Spirit we were **all** baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have **all** been made to drink into one Spirit*" [emphasis added].

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Practical Application

Let's remember to emphasize the Person and work of Christ, as John the Baptist did.

John said, "*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*"(v29). And, "*I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God*"(v34). Notice that John did not say, "Look! There is the greatest moral Teacher that ever lived!" or "Look! There is the greatest Friend a person could ever have!" Of course John **could** have said that - those things are certainly true. But John emphasized the **Person** and **work** of Jesus Christ.

"*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" - that is the **work** of Christ. And, "*I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God*" - that is the **Person** of Christ! We need to emphasize the Person and work of Christ, as John the Baptist did.

Last week I spoke at a winter retreat for teens. On Saturday we all went skiing at a small ski area, and because we had so many kids, we monopolized the place! I was riding up the chairlift with a teenage boy, and I just assumed that he was part of our group. “How you doing?” I asked. “Great!” he replied. “How are you enjoying the weekend?” “Great” I even said something like, “How are you enjoying my talks?” And he said, “Great.” I guess he thought that I was referring to our talks on the chairlift.

About halfway up the lift, I found out he was a local kid - he wasn't part of our teen retreat group at all! Although this was a little embarrassing, for the rest of the chairlift ride I had a chance to witness to this teen. He told me that he had been to AWANA as a young boy, but he never found out what a Christian was. Can you believe it? AWANA is a good ministry, but I guess the group where he went may have emphasized the games more than the message. I was able to explain to him what being a Christian really is, and how to become a Christian.

Like the people who ran that young man's AWANA group, it's very easy for any of us to get so involved in a ministry that we forget the “bottom line” – the reason for the ministry. Let's remember to **emphasize the Person and work of Christ**, as John the Baptist did!