

We are going to continue our study in John which we left right before Christmas picking up in verse 29. If you remember, we last studied an encounter between John the Baptist and certain priests and temple assistants where they were questioning his authority and challenging him as to why he thought he could baptize people for the repentance of sin. This encounter ended with John declaring to them that they had better not be so worried about him for there is one out there right now in the crowd who, will soon begin his ministry, who is far greater than John. John said that he was not even worthy to be this one's slave. We are left with the feeling that this statement made these priests extremely nervous. Let's pick up in verse 29.

John 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

One thing you will notice as we go through the book of John is that Jewish literature often speaks of its ancient history as if it just happened the other day and not thousands of years before. You have to understand, in their minds they are just the current players who apart of a story that began in the past but is an ongoing drama that continues to unfold. They see it as all connected. That is why they constantly reach back in to time and pick up stories, images, and people, and talk about them as if they were relevant right here and now. This is exactly what John was doing when he made this statement, "Behold the Lamb of God."

Now whether or not anyone listening was willing to take John serious, what he said would have instantly brought to mind a couple of powerful images in the mind of any Jew. The most obvious is the sacrificial lamb that was offered at Passover (*Exodus 12*), as well as the sacrificial lamb that was offered for the atonement of sin as prescribed in the Law (*Leviticus 5:5-7*). This was something that was still going on in their day and it was a core part of Temple worship. Every Jew knew that the blood of the lamb or goat was the means by which they were able to draw into relationship with God. It always was about the blood.

But notice, John did not just say, "Behold, the lamb," but he specifically said the "Lamb of God" or the lamb that was provided by God Himself. This would have actually brought the mind of the Jew back to a time before the Law, before Passover, before Moses, to their childhood stories of Abraham and Isaac and the miracle at Mount Moriah. Turn with me to Genesis 22 and let's read the text.

Genesis 22:1-18

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." Abraham took the wood of

the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided."

God required a bloods sacrifice and He asked Abraham to provide it, but at the last moment, in just the nick of time, Abraham and Isaac had a reprieve and God Himself miraculously provided the required sacrifice. Why do you think John pulled from this specific story? He could have just made a reference to the lamb, and left it at that. They would have been able to grasp the parallel between Jesus and the temple sacrifices.

I believe the Holy Spirit moved John the Baptist to speak in a way that captured the broader story, the next stage in this big unfolding drama between God and mankind, and He wanted to make a connection between Jesus coming to earth and the prophetic ramifications of God having provided the sacrifice in the place of Abraham's only son who was bound and helpless.

Romans 5:6

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.

The passage in ***Genesis 22*** is so rich in prophecy **and** in this one statement, "Behold the Lamb of God," John applies all of those prophecies and images to Jesus—even though they were to be completed 3-years later upon His death and resurrection.

Let's look closely at some of the detail in ***Genesis 22*** and I believe you will clearly see the parallels to Jesus. But let's first start with the location, Mount Moriah. This mountain region—which covers a pretty big span of area around Jerusalem—has an active and colorful history in the Jewish narrative.

- It is the place where God miraculously provided the substitute sacrifice.
- It was the location of the threshing floor of Araunah that was purchased by David and turned into an altar. It is here that David made a sacrifice to stop a plague that God had sent upon the nation of Israel which lasted, interestingly enough, 3-days. Right as the angel of death was going to destroy Jerusalem

the Lord relented and said enough. The Lord answered David's prayer and the plague was stopped (2 Samuel 24).

- It is the location where Solomon built the first temple.
- It is where the Garden of Gethsemane was located in area known as the Mount of Olives to the east where Jesus was arrested on the night of his betrayal.
- It is also the location of Jesus' crucifixion to the north
- Currently, a portion of it is under Muslim control and it is marked by the dome of the rock.

Obviously this land is a pretty important location to the Biblical story and what's more, it will continue to be at the center of God's unfolding plan during the time of the end that is leading up to the Second Coming of Christ. Now let's look at the specific prophetic parallels in this story of Abraham and Isaac.

- Isaac was Abraham's only son which came through the promise; Jesus is God's only Son which similarly came through the promise.
- Abraham told his servants that they will worship God on the mountain and then they will come right back believing that God would either provide another way or bring Isaac back from the dead; Jesus told his disciples that he would be right back and sure enough 3-days later He was brought back from the dead.
- Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice on his back; Jesus carried the wood for the sacrifice—the cross—on his back.
- Isaac ascended Mount Moriah; Jesus ascended Mount Moriah.

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- Isaac was a human substitute for the lamb; Jesus was the human substitute for the lamb.
 - Isaac was bound with rope, helpless to do anything about his situation; Jesus was bound and then nailed to the cross and He was helpless to do anything about His situation
 - Abraham had a knife to pierce the flesh of his son; the Roman soldiers had a spear to pierce the flesh of Jesus.
 - As it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided"—God provided the lamb and Isaac went free; God provided the lamb and we went free.

“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world;” one short sentence that connects everyone who was willing to listen to this amazing story. Sure, the drama would unfold over the next 3-years, but John wanted everyone to know that Jesus, the very miraculous provision of God, would carry His own wood up the Mountain and would die in our place for the sins of all men.

Of course, someone who was astute in Jewish literature would likely have also been instantly reminded of the prophecy in *Isaiah 53* where it talks about one who would die and would be crushed for our sins – like a lamb led to the slaughter.

Isaiah 53:1-12

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken

of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Surely our grief's He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” One sentence that has turned lives inside out and upside down. One sentence that has changed the course of all humanity. One sentence that will radically change your life if you let it become the truth to which you cling.

John 1:30, 31

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

I find these two sentences very interesting on a couple of counts. First of all, John is clearly saying that Jesus is God. This will be a theme that we will have put in our faces over and over again in the Gospel of John and you will be amazed at the creative ways in which this truth is communicated. We know from the gospel of Luke that Jesus was conceived approximately 6-months after John the Baptist was conceived. John was literally born before Jesus; but I don't think John was that worried about trying to make a point of physical birth order to those who were following him. He was saying that Jesus is preferred, Jesus is superior, Jesus is greater due to the fact that Jesus pre-existed John; and the tense of the verb in the Greek indicates that John was saying that as a matter of fact not speculation.

Now, the only way Jesus could have existed and have always existed before John is if Jesus was in fact part of the Godhead. That is what John was saying. Behold the Lamb of God who is Himself God. The words of John the Baptist perfectly dove-tail with the way in which the Apostle John started this book: “In the beginning the Word

already existed. He was with God, and He was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

Second, notice that John said he did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. The New American Standard Bible says: “I did not know Him.” This is interesting because Mary, Jesus’ mother, was a relative of John’s Mother, Elizabeth. So Jesus and John were cousins of some sort and probably saw each other on and off while they grew up. After all, when Mary got the news that Elizabeth was pregnant we are told in *Luke 1:39* that she traveled to the hill country in Judea where Elizabeth lived to visit her.

So what did John mean when he said: “I did not recognize Him or know Him?” I am sure John heard all the stories about Mary, the virgin birth, and all that from his mother, and I am sure if they hung out as kids he knew that Jesus was different, special even, but recognizing that Jesus was God that Jesus was the Messiah, that was another thing altogether.

This raises another interesting theme that you will find repeated over and over in the Book of John. Jesus only did what His Father told Him to do, He only said what His Father told Him to say, and He only went where His Father told Him to go. Jesus was always submitted to the will of the Father—even as a little boy. *Hebrews 5:8* tells us that Jesus learned obedience in all things—an obedience that strengthened His will such that one day He could say: “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will not mine” (*Luke 22:42*).

Are you following where I am going with this? Even though Jesus was indwelt with the fullness of the godhead and could have—at any time—proved to everyone that He was God with a simple miracle or two, the Father did not want Him to do or say anything that would reveal this truth to the world prior to the time that it was appointed by the Father. Thus, although John the Baptist knew Jesus, he never knew

Him as God, until that day it was pointed out to John by the Holy Spirit. This is not really all that unusual, for even His family had the same reaction. We will find in *John 7:5* that Jesus' brothers, who grew up with Him, did not even believe He was the Messiah. I am sure this is for the same reason; Jesus probably never did a miracle or any other thing to prove who He was before His time.

To me, this has always been an amazing concept. Jesus came down from heaven in the form of man so that He could bring life to people, so that He could heal them and remove the damage that sin had mercilessly unleashed on the people that He loved. Yet, for 30-years of His life, the Father did not let Jesus help anyone. He could not tell them who He was and He was not allowed to do anything He came to earth to do. Loved ones died and Jesus was not allowed to do anything about it. Friends and family got sick, they got caught up in false teaching, they were overwhelmed with the realities of this life, and Jesus was not allowed to do anything about it before His time. The Father asked Jesus to wait, and to wait, and to wait and then when He did let Him loose to minister it was only for a brief 3-year moment in time. That is nothing especially considering what Jesus gave up in heaven in order to come to earth.

But like us, Jesus had to learn obedience to the Father and He had to learn to wait patiently. He had to learn to not live by what He felt, by what He saw, or by what He thought He wanted; rather, He had to learn to live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. As a result, Jesus only did what His Father told Him to do, only said what His Father told Him to say, and only went where His Father told Him to go. Again, this is going to be an ongoing theme we will see in this book—over and over again.

Ephesians 5:1 says that we are to follow God's example in all things. Therefore, if this is who Jesus lived, then it is to be the way we live. If Jesus lived by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God, so are we. If Jesus only did what His Father

told Him to do, only said what He told Him to say, and only went where He told Him to go, so are we. We are to live as He lived.

John 1:32-34

Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. 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.' I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God."

Now what is remarkable about these 3 verses? First of all, those who doubt that a person can really hear God talk to them, especially about the details of their life just need to take a back seat. John makes it pretty clear that he heard with remarkable clarity and sure enough, it all happened exactly as God said. I think that is so cool. When you grow in your intimacy with God, when the barriers of unbelief and wrong belief are broken, and the voice of your *old man* has less control and power in your life, you will start hearing—with clarity—how God speaks to you. Many times, what He has to say to you will be very specific and tangible in terms of your life and where He is leading it. And, believe me, He will do everything He says He will do. Sure at times it will be different than what you thought, but when it happens, it will all make perfect sense. This is the experience that John the Baptist had that special day when He baptized Jesus.

I want to take a moment to help you understand the timeline of what is going on by connecting to the stories in the other gospels. This incident that John is referring to is

when He baptized Jesus and the Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven said: “You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you” (*Luke 3:21-22; Mark 1:9-11*). This took place approximately 40+ days earlier. We are told in *Mark 1:12* that immediately after His baptism, the Holy Spirit compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness. He was there for 40-days, being tempted by Satan. So it was upon His return from that harrowing event that John points out Jesus to the crowd and testifies that He is the One!

If you remember in the introduction, I said that the idea of a *witness* was going to be another theme that we will come across over and over again. The Jewish law required that any statement or piece of evidence must be validated by at least the testimony of 2 to 3 witnesses. John is declaring that he was an eye-witness to these events (testimony number 1). John is declaring that the Father verbally gave His testimony, to all those who were present, that Jesus is the beloved Son who had come from God (testimony number 2). Third, John is declaring that Holy Spirit was present and by descending upon Jesus in visible form, He was also testifying to this truth (testimony number 3). 1,2,3, witnesses—incontrovertible evidence according to the Law that Jesus is the Son of God or as some manuscripts read: the chosen One of God.

He is the One! He is the One that you have to consider in all that you do. He is our example, He is the one in whom we are to find our life: all that we are, all that we ever hope to be is to be found in Him. Like John the Baptist, we are to be His witnesses to this truth.

Let's Pray.