

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 12

“**JOHN 1:29** *The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* ³⁰ *This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me: for He was before me.* ³¹ *And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.*”John 1:29)

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

In this text we are witnessing the expression of the Divine Nature as revealed in the Prophets: *“Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets”* (Amos 3:7). I want to emphasize that this is a revelation of God’s own nature. From this we deduce that the Lord wants people to in some way be prepared for what He does. Men do not do well in their reaction to things that are surprising to them. Often we will read of people beholding some Divine work for which they were not prepared. It is said that they *“marveled”* (Matt 8:27; John 7:15), or were *“astonished”* (Mk 5:42; Mk 7:37), or were *“perplexed”* (Mk 24:4). Others, who had given heed to the preparatory revelations of the Lord would respond, *“this is that”* (Acts 2:16), or *“we have found him”* (John 1:45), and *“This is the Christ”* (John 7:41). The one’s who respond most favorably to Christ are those who have believed what God has said about Him in *“the record God has given of His Son”* (1 John 5:10-11). In such a practical matter as knowing whether or not we are saved, the ground of surety is being able to associate what God has said He will do in the saved ones with what we ourselves have experienced. God promised His laws would be written upon our heart (Jer 31:33), that we would all know the Lord (Jer 31:34), that we would be able to express our joy (Isa 35:6), that we would be willing (Psa 110:3), and that those who formerly knew Him not would serve Him (Psa 18:43). This manner is perfectly adapted to living by faith. When we believe what God has said, He will confirm to our hearts when the saying is fulfilled. But this will not happen for those who do not believe what He has promised.

The marvel of this is seen in the times during which John ministered. The outward circumstances did not of themselves suggest that the Messiah was coming. The Jewish religion had become sterile, and who had any clear memory of when the last miracle had been seen, or any prophet had clearly spoken before John commenced to preach? Yet, there were some who were expecting (Lk 34:15), were waiting (Mk 1:43,) and were looking (Lk 2:38). These were the ones John especially ministered to.

WHY BAPTIZEST THOU?

“**John 1:29** *“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”*”

THE NEXT DAY. This is the day following his conversation with the men sent from the Pharisees to identify who John was. There is a divergence of opinion about when this took place. A number of respected men feel it was after Jesus had been baptized, and after He had been tempted in the wilderness. John does not record the actual baptizing of Jesus – only John’s testimony

concerning it. Following Jesus' baptism I do not believe He returned to the place where John was baptizing. That does not seem to blend well with Luke's account of Christ's return from the temptation: *"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about"* (Luke 4:14). It is generally understood that Bethabara was in Judea, and Luke informs us Jesus **came** from Galilee to John's baptism (Matt 3:13), and went to Galilee following His temptation (Lk 4:14).

To me, the answer is that John is not providing a strictly chronological account in John 1:15-40. He is rather providing the testimony of John in order of its importance, and in a kind of summation of what John said of the Christ. Notwithstanding, this is not something that justifies extensive investigation and dialog.

JOHN SEETH JESUS COMING TO HIM. The day after John had said there was one standing among the people who they did not know. Jesus apparently stepped forward to come to John. Whether or not this was when Jesus came to be baptized by him, I do not know. We do know that the conformation that Jesus was the Christ took place when John baptized Him (Matt 3:17; Mk 1:1; Lk 3:22). I am persuaded that the apostle is not providing a strictly sequential account of the events, but is focusing on John himself, the man that was *"sent from God"* (John 1:6). Whereas the other Gospel writers tell us what God testified of Jesus, the apostle John, at this point, gives us John's testimony of the Christ, for he was His forerunner.

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD. I gather that this was a moment of insight as was experience by Peter when he said to Jesus, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matt 16:16).

"The expression "the Lamb of God" was unique, and was surely a revelation. No prophet ever referred to the coming Christ as "the Lamb of God." Isaiah prophesied that He would be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa 53:7). It is John the Revelator who refers to Jesus as "the Lamb" (Rev 5:8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:14,22,23; 22:1,3). I want to emphasize that no prophet ever referred to the coming Messiah as "the Lamb of God," or "the Lamb."

WHICH TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD. Isaiah prophesied *"the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"* (Isa 53:6), yet said nothing of sin being taken away. Daniel prophesied the Messiah would *"finish the transgression,"* and *"make an end of sins"* (Dan 9:24) – but it was all rather vague. A living goat was a type of Christ, upon whom the sins of Israel were typically transferred, and the goat was led away into an uninhabited place, being let go there (Lev 16:21-22). Even then, before the Israelites, the figure was not very clear.

Paul clarifies what is meant by *"the Lamb of God."* The term does not apply to the many lambs that were offered in sacrifice to God as specified in the Law. Actually *"the lamb"* which was a type of Christ was instituted before the Law. It was the Passover Lamb, as is particularly stated by Paul: *"Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us"* (1 Cor 5:7). The Passover lamb was the one whose blood delivered the people. It is the one that prepared the people for deliverance from bondage. In respect of being offered, the Passover Lamb and the offerings on the Day of atonement are combined into one marvelous figure. The Passover Lamb was slain, was eaten, and its blood was the basis of deliverance (Ex 12:3-23). On the day of atonement a bullock, was killed for a sin offering (Lev 16:11), a goat was offered for a sin offering (Lev 16:15-19), and the sins of the people were transferred to a live goat was taken to a land not inhabited (Lev 16:20-22). All of this was combined in Christ, who alone is *"the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."*

So far as we know, no one was every shown this depiction of Christ before John the Baptist. The phrases *"sin of the world"* (John 1:29), or *"the sins of the whole world"* (1 John 2:2)

were never mentioned prior to John the Baptist. In fact *"the whole world"* is only mentioned one time prior to Matthew's Gospel (Job 34:13). Only in Noah's day was the universal wickedness of men particularly mentioned (Gen 6:5). Twice we read of the total corruption of men (Psa 14:1-3; 53:1-3). The book of Job contains some references to the universal nature of sin (Job 15:16). With a few exceptions, the prophets upbraided Israel for her sins, with occasional references to other nations. Here, however, John speaks of *"the sin of the world."*

THIS IS HE

³⁰ *"This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me: for He was before me."* **THIS IS HE.** As Jesus approached to John he Harbinger, he is careful to make clear who He is. This is not someone like the Pharisees who came to question who John was. Also, John will make clear that he had not been speaking of the distant appearance of some man. John knew, and now he further clarified to the people that his ministry was one of preparation. Although he was transcendent to all that sent before him, he was preparing the way for one greater than himself.

The working of the Lord is always focused. When He sent Samuel to anoint a new king, and David was brought before him, the Lord said, *"This is he"* (1 Sam 16:12). Jesus said of John the Baptist, *"For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee"* (Matt 11:10). When speaking of Jesus, John wrote, *"This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth"* (1 John 5:6).

It all narrows down to a person – not a position, but a Person; not an institution, but a Person; not a personal benefit, but a Person; not a life-discipline, but a Person!

AFTER ME COMETH A MAN. So far as sequence was concerned, Jesus came *"after"* John. Regarding priority, He was before John. His ministry followed that of John, but was transcendent to John's ministry. Although He was the *"Second Man,"* He was the preeminent man (1 Cor 15:47). He died long after Adam, but His death was the most important one.

The new birth is second in sequence, but preeminent in effect. The New Covenant is referred to as *"the Second"* (Heb 10:9), but it is the *"better covenant"* (Heb 8:6). The church is the second God-ordained body of people, but it has the priority over Israel, being *"the body of Christ"* (Col 1:18).

WHICH IS PREFERRED BEFORE ME. This is the third time John has made this statement (1:15,27,30). For John to say this carries infinitely more weight than if some other contemporary said it. At the time of our text, so far as public ministry was concerned, John was the greatest of all. However, when Jesus entered to commence His ministry of going about, doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38), the superiority of both His Person and work would become apparent. John himself *"did no miracle"* (John 10:41), but Jesus' ministry was filled with miracles that could not be counted.

For Jesus to be *"preferred"* means that He is chosen above all others. As soon as He enters the pictures, everyone and everything else becomes secondary, if, indeed, they are even allowed a ranking that high. Jesus is to the moral and spiritual domains what the sun is to the realm of earth. Before it rises, all kinds of light are visible, varying in size and intensity. But when the sun rises to its full strength, its preferred status is evident.

HE WAS BEFORE ME. Jesus once said of Himself, *"Before Abraham was, I am"* (John 8:58). It was the same with John, and with every person who ever lived, beginning with Adam. Whoever they are, and wherever they were, Jesus was *"before"* them. His humanity had a beginning, but He did not. His ministry had a beginning, but He did not. If that is all we knew about

the Lord Jesus, it is enough to require our submission to Him. It is enough for us to be willing to recede into the background.

Micah said that Jesus' "goings forth," or "origins,"^{NIV} were "from everlasting" (Mic 5:2). John said that from the beginning He was "with God, and was God" (John 1:1). Isaiah said His name was "Everlasting Father" (Isa 9:6). Jesus spoke to the Father of "the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

The "before" aspect of Jesus is not receiving much attention these days. Nor, indeed, is His humanity duly recognized as the result of Him humbling Himself (Phil 2:8) in order that He might lay down His life, and take it up again (John 10:17-28). The preeminent reason for Jesus coming to earth was to do the will of the Father – and that has everything to do with His presence with the Father before the world was.

What has taken place in our time is that Jesus has been made too human. His likeness to men has been overstated, and used to make men comfortable in an alienated state. The insight and spirit of John the Baptist is rarely proclaimed or confessed: "He is preferred before me, for He was before me" (John 1:15,30). That preference and existence prior to the world being created demands our subservience to Christ. It requires that we come to Him, hear Him, obey Him, and live for Him. To fail to do this is to refuse to view Christ as He really is. God has made no provision for men to receive Christ in any capacity other than the One He has ordained. He must be embraced as the Superior One, the Everlasting One, the Reigning One, and the Interceding One. All of this requires that He be seen as the One with "eternal glory." Eternity must be seen as superior, to time. Heaven must be seen as higher-ranking than the earth. The purpose of God is to be perceived as outranking all human purpose. All of this begins with the apprehension of this truth: Jesus is "a Man preferred before me; for He was before me."

I KNEW HIM NOT

³¹ "And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water." This is not necessarily a sequential record of what John said. It is, in my view, a kind of synopsis of what he had to say about Jesus, and is not strictly chronological.

I KNEW HIM NOT. Other versions read, "I did not know Him,"^{NKJV} "did not recognize Him,"^{NASB} "I myself had no knowledge of Him,"^{BEBE} "I didn't know He was the one,"^{LIVING} and "I didn't know He was the one."^{WEYMOUTH}

Just as Abraham did not know the way to the Canaan until he was on the way to it (Heb 11:8), and did not know which mountain he was to offer Isaac on (Gen 22:2), so John did not know the identity of the One for whom he was preparing the way, until it the time appointed by God. Thus, for a short season, he told people of One who was coming, yet He did not know who it was.

John in some way recognized Jesus when he was in Elizabeth's womb, and leaped, resulting in Elizabeth being filled with Holy Spirit and prophesying (Lk 1:41,44). This confirms that there is a part of man that is higher and more discerning than the intellect. It is not a circumstance upon which men can capitalize, or manage. However, "there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (Job 32:8). In the womb, it was that "spirit" of John that recognized the Son of God, even though his intellect was not yet operative.

There are moments of spiritual clarity that fade away – i.e. Peter confessing who Jesus was, then saying Jesus would not die. Recall how Peter answered the inquiry, "But whom say ye that I am?" In a moment of spiritual insight Peter "answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16). Jesus quickly revealed to him what had actually taken place:

"Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven" (Matt 16:17). Peter, after analyzing the question, and briefly reviewing the circumstances, had not answered out of his intellect. This was the expression of his spirit, to which God had revealed the true identity of Jesus.

Hardly any time had passed until *"From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day"* (Matt 16:21). At this point, Peter had apparently forgotten what he had confessed, for it is written, *"Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee"* (Matt 16:22). Jesus did not take Peter's words casually, but responded, *"and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men"* (Matt 16:23).

Perhaps you have perceived with your spirit some great thing concerning Christ, and spoke what you saw – only to later speak or act in complete contradiction of what you said. What happened? Your intellect lagged behind your spirit, and you were living too close to the domain where truth cannot be seen with clarity. There is a sense in which "familiarity breeds contempt." That is, the more Jesus is perceived to be like us, the less His true nature can be seen.

HE SHOULD BE MADE MANIFEST TO ISRAEL. God revealed to John that the Messiah would initially be made known to Israel, not the world. Peter said to Israel, *"Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities"* (Acts 3:26). Peter referred to the Gospel as *"the word which God sent unto Israel"* (Acts 10:36). Paul said, *"Of this man's [David] seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus"* (Acts 13:23). Israel was the nation to whom *"a child"* would be born, and *"a son"* would be given (Isa 9:6). They were the people whom God cultured to receive a Savior. John was to *"make ready a people prepared for the Lord"* (Luke 1:17). That was his sole ministry. He was not a mere social reformer

THEREFORE AM I COME BAPTIZING WITH WATER. John will open this matter further in the verses that follow. It is enough here to note the reason for John baptizing. It was not primarily to work reform among the people, although some of that was done. In this regard, his ministry differed significantly from that of the Elijah that Malachi promised would come (Mal 4:5-6). His primary ministry was that of turning the people, whereas John the Baptist's ministry was to prepare people to receive Christ, who would be manifested during his ministry.

This necessarily infers that John knew all along that he would eventually fade into the background, and that his ministry was designed to be a temporary one. It was not intended to make him famous, although, among *"the elect,"* he is well known and appreciated. This also confirms that baptism, as practiced by John, was not at all common in those days. If the purpose for him baptizing with water was that the Messiah would be made known in that baptism, how could there possibly have been proselyte baptisms at that time. If there was, how would the people view Christ's baptism? To me, the purpose for John's baptism demands that baptism itself be unique at that time.