

The Testimony of John the Baptist

John 1:29-34

29 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."

Last time we began to look at the testimony of John the Baptist about Jesus. Remember that the purpose of the Gospel of John is **"that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name,"** (John 20:31). As I said in a previous message this gospel is almost like a courtroom drama. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the apostle John has given his opening statement in John 1:1-18. He has declared Jesus to be the eternal Word, the Light, the Life, and the only begotten Son of God who came into this world as the Word made flesh. So the gospel of John is in the opening eighteen verses a declaration of the deity of Christ.

And then starting in verse 19, he gives us the evidences or witnesses proving that declaration to be true. The first witness he calls is John the Baptist. Verse 19 begins, **"Now this is the testimony of John."**

In 1:19-28, John testified that he was not the Light, not the Christ; in 1:29-34, he bore witness to the Light testifying who Jesus is and what He came to do; and finally in 1:35-51, John's witness bears fruit as several of his disciples believe in Jesus and begin to follow Him.

1. Jesus is the Lamb of God

Last time we saw that John identified Jesus as the Lamb of God. Jesus Christ is the ultimate lamb that God Himself would provide would be a sacrifice who would be slaughtered as a substitute for our sins. That is who Jesus is and what He came to do. He is the perfect, sinless Son of God who died for the sin of the world. If you missed last week's lesson I encourage you to go to the church website and read or listen to it.

So the Baptist's first testimony is that Jesus is the Lamb of God. The second part of his testimony is:

2. Jesus is human and divine (1:30-31)

30 "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'

We already considered the truth of this verse when we studied verses 15 and 27 of this chapter so I won't go into detail on that today. Again if you missed those messages they are available for you to review. As I pointed out then, the phrase, **"After me comes a Man,"** refers to Jesus' humanity. He was born after John. He was a true man. Then the phrase **"for He was before me,"** refers to the eternal nature of the Son of God, that He existed before John even though Jesus was born after John. As verse 14 said, **"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."** Therefore Jesus ranks higher than John as the verse says, He **"is preferred before me."** So verse 30 reinforces both Jesus' humanity (He was born after John) and His deity (He existed before John).

Jesus was so perfectly human that John says in verse 31, **"I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."** John would not have recognized Jesus as the Messiah and Lamb of God if God had not revealed it to him. It is likely that John knew Jesus personally (afterall, his mother was related to John's mother). But what John says is that he did not fully recognize Jesus as the Son of God until God revealed it to him.

John's whole purpose in life and in his ministry was to point to Jesus Christ. That is the reason why he came baptizing with water, **"that He should be revealed to Israel."** The purpose of his baptism was to reveal the Messiah, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the one who is the eternal Word made flesh who is both human and divine.

And this is supremely important. Because for Jesus Christ to be the sin bearer, the **"Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,"** He had to be both human and divine. No ordinary human being could bear the sin of the world. He had to be human in order to die. He had to be divine in order to be sinless. Jesus is absolutely before John and therefore ranks infinitely above him. And because of all this, He can be **"the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."**

3. Jesus possesses the Spirit and baptizes with the Spirit (1:32-33).

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.'

These verses tell us how God revealed the identity of Jesus to John. It was at His baptism. The Gospel of John does not show Jesus being baptized by John. The other gospels (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22) report that event. Instead, John focuses on what Jesus' baptism revealed about Him.

Jesus' baptism must have taken place prior to this testimony of the Baptist that John records here. We know from the other gospels that after Jesus was baptized immediately He was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. That took forty days. So now it is some six weeks after John baptized Jesus. And John is recalling what happened when he baptized Jesus. There was a visible manifestation of the Spirit that looked like a dove.

Why a dove? The dove was one of the clean animals that you could sacrifice if you were too poor to afford a lamb (Leviticus 5:7). So it stood for purity and lowliness or humility. So, of all the birds that connect heaven and earth by their flying and landing, the dove was the one that seemed the most suitable symbol of the Holy Spirit. So John's Gospel omits the baptism of Jesus without a mention in order to focus all attention on one thing: the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and remained on Him.

Old Testament was clear that the Messiah would be anointed by the Spirit. Isaiah 11:1-2 prophesies, **"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."** Isaiah 42:1 again speaks about the Messiah saying, **"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations."** Or, Isaiah 61:1-2a (which Jesus quoted of Himself, in the Synagogue at Nazareth in Luke 4:18-19), **"The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is upon Me*, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are bound*. To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD...."**

This is why God said to John in John 1:33, **"Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."** This was the sign from God to John to confirm what John must have suspected: Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. John's statement that the Spirit **"remained upon Him"** contrasts with those in the Old Testament who received the Holy Spirit only for a limited time. It shows that Jesus' entire ministry would be characterized by the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This is who Jesus is: the Lamb of God and the One who has the Spirit of God. If Jesus were not first the Lamb of God who takes away sin by dying, He could never be the baptizer who gives the Spirit by rising.

John contrasts his water baptism with Jesus's Spirit baptism. He wants us to feel the immense superiority of Jesus in this contrast. Baptizing with the Spirit and baptizing with water is so vastly different, it is (as Piper puts it) "like the difference between lightning and a lightning bug. It's the difference between a person and a painting, between a marriage and a ring, between a birth and a birth certificate, between immersion in water and immersion in God."

So Jesus is the One who will baptize, immerse people into the Spirit of God. Again the Old Testament promised that this is what would happen to the people of the Messiah:

(Joel 2:28-29) **28 "And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. 29 And also on [My] menservants and on [My] maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.**

(Isaiah 44:3) **3 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring;**

(Ezekiel 36:27) **27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do [them]."**

Jesus is the one who does this. He promised the disciples that it was to their advantage that He go away so that He could send the Holy Spirit to be with them and to dwell in them ([John 14:16-17](#)). That promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and empowered them to bear witness to the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe the Bible teaches that the baptism of the Spirit refers to the Spirit's imparting new life at the moment of regeneration. Jesus will say to Nicodemus in John 3:5-7,

5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Paul told the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 12:13) **"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."** When God saves us, He imparts new life through the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in us. Romans 8:9 says, **"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."** . "Baptism" pictures total identification with Christ and an abundant supply of the Spirit for our every need.

The baptism of the Spirit is once-for-all, when He imparts new life to us and comes to dwell in us. But the filling of the Holy Spirit is not a once-for-all done deal. We need repeated fillings of the Holy Spirit to resist temptation, to grow in godliness and the fruit of the Spirit, and to bear witness for Christ. I think it was John MacArthur who was asked why we need to be filled with the Spirit over and over again and he said, "Because I leak." Yes! Finally,

4. Jesus is the Son of God (1:34).

34 "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

This is John's conclusion about the person of Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, both human and divine, the possessor of the Spirit and baptizer with the Spirit. The only one who could be all of this is the Son of God.

Jesus alone is the eternal Son of God. He stands in a unique relationship with the Father. In the Bible, when someone is called the "son of" it means that he is characterized by or has the very nature of his father. As John wrote in verse 18, **"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared [Him]."** Jesus would later say, **"He who has seen Me has seen the Father,"** (John 14:9). The Jews recognized that when Jesus called God His own Father, He was making Himself equal with God (John 5:18).

So the very first witness shows that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah revealed to God's people. He is the Son of God whom God sent to save His people from sin. He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, giving new birth and empowering His people to bear witness of Him. That is John's testimony. He saw and he bore witness.

What is your testimony?

To be faithful witnesses, we must show people that Jesus is the eternal Son of God in human flesh, the Lamb of God who atoned for the sins of all who believe in Him, the Son of God who baptizes with the Spirit.

A father and his small son strolled down the street in Chicago past a place where a skyscraper was being constructed. Glancing up, they saw men at work on the high story building. "What are those little boys doing up there?" asked the son. "Those are not boys, they are grown men," replied the father. After a pause, the boy pondered, "I guess when they reach heaven there won't be anything left of them."

The nearer we come to Christ, the less others see of us and the more they see of Christ. Do as John the Baptist. Always point them to Jesus.

We need to know for ourselves and then proclaim to our world the good news of who Jesus is and what He came to do. We are sinners and He is God's only Savior from sin. He is the only way to eternal life.