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This Is the Son of God

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 1:19-34

Pastor Bryan Clark

To understand our story today, we have to go back to the beginning of the story—and the story begins in a garden paradise called Eden. The first two chapters of Genesis are the world as God intended it to be. Most of us would say there's something deep within us that longs for something different, and something more. So, matter of fact, sometimes it just feels like we were made for a different world. And the reason we feel that is because we actually were. We were made for the world as God intended it to be, and we feel that deeply.

But Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God and believe that their way was better than God's way, and so plunged the world and the human race into darkness. From paradise to darkness—and we feel it deeply every day! But even before you can turn the pages of the Bible, God made a promise. Somehow, some way, through the seed of a woman, He would make a way back. There's a hint in Genesis 3 that it would require the shedding of blood to somehow cover the shame and the guilt of sin. For thousands of years this promise was prophesied; it was predicted; it was foreshadowed, imagined—and for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years, the nation of Israel waited for their long, promised Messiah. *“O come, O come, Emmanuel.”* Many of them began to lose hope as life just became more and more confusing and difficult. At the end of the Old Testament—the book of Malachi—God, in an act of discipline, because of their continued idolatry and sin, simply went silent, and for 400 long years, God was silent while the nation struggled under the dominance of one nation after another. By the first century, the nation of Israel was under the dominance of Rome. Many had given up hope that the long-awaited Messiah would ever come. Then came that glorious moment when John the Baptist would announce publicly that the long-awaited Messiah—the Savior of the world—had finally come. *“The Light had entered into the darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it.”*

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 1. John chapter 1, verses 1 through 18, is known as the prologue and has the potential to be extremely complex. Starting in verse 19, our passage this morning, is the official announcement that launches the public ministry of Jesus. Now this can get confusing between John the Baptist and the Apostle John who wrote the Gospel. So, it's helpful to understand the Apostle John, who wrote the Gospel, never mentions himself by name anywhere in the Gospel. So, the name John here is always a reference to John the Baptist. We do believe John the apostle was a disciple of John the Baptist, and it's highly likely that he was there and was an eyewitness to the events recorded here. So, we pick it up in verse 19:

This is the testimony of John, [so John the Baptist] when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” (*NASB, John 1:19)

So **the Jews** is a favorite reference for John, the writer of the Gospel. He uses this term over seventy times, and most of the time it's a reference to the religious leaders in Jerusalem that were hostile toward Jesus—not all the time but most of the time. These would have been the religious leaders, then, that sent a delegation of **priests** and **Levites**—so you might say those responsible for the theology and the practices of the temple—to figure out who John is. By this time John's movement

was growing, was significant, so they're trying to figure out, "Who is this guy?" "Verse 20: [John knows what they're asking.]

And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

So, Christ is not Jesus' last name; it's His title—literally means *anointed One*. The Hebrew word would be *Messiah*; the Greek word would be *Christ*, the anointed One. So they're asking Him, "Are you the Christ?" One thing that strikes me is the potential was extremely high in this moment for John to exploit this moment for personal gain. It's a reminder that the celebrity within the Christian faith is not the messenger. It's the one the message is about. There should be only one celebrity in the Christian faith, and that is Jesus Himself. The reason verse 20 reads so clumsily is because John is doubly emphatic, **"I am not the Christ."**

They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." (Vs. 21)

So three questions: **"Are you the Christ?" "I am not the Christ."** The Jews believed that Elijah would come back as a forerunner to the Messiah, so that's what they're asking. **"I am not."** They also believe from Deuteronomy that a prophet like Moses would come. So that's why they're asking that, and the answer is, **"No."** Now notice that each answer gets progressively shorter. The technique is to communicate to us that John the Baptist is getting frustrated with their questions. **"I am not the Christ!" ... "I am not!" ... "No!"** which leads to a logical follow up question:

Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" (Vs. 22)

That's a reasonable question. This delegation has to go back to those who sent them with an answer. So, they're asking John, "Give us an answer: **Who are you?"** Verse 23:

He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

So he quotes from Isaiah, chapter 40, verse 3, and identifies himself as the **Voice**. So, in the beginning was the **Word**. And the *Word became flesh*. John wasn't the Word, just merely a voice, the announcer. In the ancient world, without all of the technology that we have today, announcements were made through a town crier. That's essentially what he's saying, "I am the town crier." Somebody loudly announced the most important messages. There was no message of greater importance than the announcement that a king is coming. The idea of, **"Make straight the path,"** carried the idea that if the king is coming, there was a delegation that would go out before the king, and make sure there were no rocks or boulders in the path. Even if there were hills, they would try to cut the hills, to make it possible for the path of the king to be as straight and as smooth as possible. So John is saying, "I am the town crier, and I'm telling you The King is coming." John was making the path straight through his message and baptism of repentance, so that the nation would prepare themselves to receive the coming Messiah. Verse 24:

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (Vs. 24-25)

So the Pharisees were a religious group, very political; literally their name meant that they were zealots, and they will be a significant part of the Jesus story. So they're ratcheting up the tone a little bit, and essentially they're saying, "Who gave you authority to baptize?" Now the background of what's happening here is that baptism was not new to the Jews. They practiced baptism of full immersion in water anytime a Gentile converted to Judaism. So, there was a public identifying of this conversion to Judaism, but then there was also this cleansing symbolism, that by going from the idolatry of a Gentile to becoming a Jew, they were cleansed in a baptism. What was not common were Jews being baptized. We know from the Synoptic Gospels that John was baptizing Jews in a baptism of repentance. So the tone behind the question is, "Wait a minute, if you're not the Christ, if you're not Elijah, if you're not the Prophet, who gave you authority to baptize Jews?" That's what they're asking. Verse 26:

John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know."

Now there are two possibilities to what John just said. One, which is likely, there would have been a large crowd and what John is actually saying is the long-awaited Messiah, the One we've been looking for, He's actually right here with us, and you don't even know it. The other option is just more general, that He's been walking among us and you didn't even know it. Now stop and think about this for a minute. For hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years, the nation has agonized over their longing for the promised Messiah. In that moment, people were filled with despair, with hopelessness, with pain, with suffering—many of them struggling to believe God would ever keep His promise. In that moment, there were the lame...the blind...the sick; think about all the people in the Gospels who will encounter Jesus, and their lives will be changed forever! In that moment they had no idea that after hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years, the One whom they had longed for that would rock their world, was standing among them! They just didn't know it. Many of them would not receive Him but some would, and their lives would be changed forever! I want you to hold on to that, because at the end I want to come back to that, because I think the same thing can be true today. Verse 27:

"It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (Vs. 27-28)

So, the background to what John just said is that in the first century, when someone was entering a dwelling, their thong or strap of their sandal was to be untied and their feet would be washed before they entered the dwelling. It was considered the job of the lowest slave possible to remove the sandal and wash the feet. Even among the slaves, it was understood to be the lowest of all jobs. In the first century there were rabbis or teachers, and they had followers they called disciples. They would travel about, and it was understood it was the responsibility of the disciples to do many, many, many things for the rabbi or the teacher. But they actually had, in writing, that the line that would not be crossed is that no disciple would untie the thong on the sandal of the feet of the teacher. That's the line they would not cross; it was too low for them to even consider doing that. So now think about this moment when John, who has such a significant following says, "*I'm not even worthy to untie the thong of His sandal; He is so much greater than me.*" That's the moment there.

The idea in verse 28 of **Bethany**—we don't know where this Bethany is today. There's the Bethany that was near Jerusalem where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived. We know where that is today; you can visit that site. But we don't know where this Bethany was. It was farther north, and on the other side, east of the Jordan. The significance to us is that one of the distinctives of the Gospels is that they are full of detailed information regarding names and places. If the Gospels were legends, as some claim, legends do not have specific names and locations. Everyone agrees with that. It's also

true that if this was a mere fabrication, when you fabricate a story, you don't have specific names and places because it can be investigated. One of many evidences that the Gospels are historical documents, is they have such precise information regarding names and places. As a matter of fact, historians and archaeologists have gone back and they are astounded at the accuracy of both the names and places in history. So, for our purposes, that's the value of verse 28. Verse 29:

The next day...

Now, I've got to give you a little background here. So this is fairly obvious. There were events that happened the *first day*. Now this is the **next day**. But in the broader context, John is going to recall what he experienced when Jesus was baptized. That event is roughly six weeks before this moment. We know from the Synoptics that when Jesus was baptized, they heard the voice of the Father from heaven, "*Thou art My Son, My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,*" and the Spirit, as a dove, came upon Him. So you have this amazing moment of all three members of the Trinity publicly in view in a sense, with the voice, the dove, and God in the flesh. You remember last week, just the challenge, "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God,*" so equal, but distinct, and *the Word was God*, but not *the* God, because it's *one* member of the Trinity. So: God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit—equally God, fully God in every way. So, at the baptism of Jesus, this is played out and this is a part of what John is recalling. After the baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days. Now He's back from the wilderness, so this is roughly six weeks later. And this is the official announcement that the Messiah has come.

The next day, he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Vs. 29)

So, there's quite a bit of discussion about kind of the specifics of: "Where is John getting this terminology?" But in its simplest form, we go all the way back to Genesis 3, and we are reminded when God made a promise, that through the seed of a woman He would make a way back, there was at least a hint that it would include the shedding of blood to cover the guilt and shame of sin. Fast forward to when Abraham is taking Isaac to the top of the mountain—the mountain upon which, in the first century, the temple sat. And Isaac asked Abraham, "Where is the lamb?" And Abraham said, "God will provide."

On the afternoon that Jesus was crucified, it was the afternoon before the Passover. At two o'clock in the afternoon and following, the lambs would be slaughtered in preparation for Passover the next day. While Jesus, the Lamb of God, was slain on a cross, the lambs for Passover were being slain in the temple at that very same hour. Some scholars, such as Phillips and some others, believe that because this was just days before the Passover, the shepherds were moving flocks of sheep to Jerusalem. So, on the afternoon before Passover, they would be slaughtered in preparation for the festival. Therefore, it is likely that the backdrop to John the Baptist's statement was with sheep visibly coming through and making noise. And in that context, John the Baptist declares that, "**This is the Christ, the Lamb of God, who comes to take away the sin of the world.**" This made clear the mission was that His blood would be shed in order to deal with the problem of sin. Verse 30:

"This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"

This is a repeat of verse 15. So even though John the Baptist is older, he again is saying, *Jesus existed before him*. He's referring to what we call the pre-incarnate Christ—that Jesus existed before his birth,

as the eternal Word of God, the eternal Son of God. It's confirmation again, "This is the eternal Son of God, who has now taken on human flesh." Verse 31:

"I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'" (Vs. 31-33)

So what does John mean when he says, "**I did not recognize him**"? It's highly unlikely he's saying that he was a stranger. You remember Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, were relatives. So, they were family. You remember John the Baptist's father was a priest, so at least the family name would have been known among the priests. Mary and Jesus lived up north in Galilee, in Nazareth, and Elizabeth and John lived south around Jerusalem, so they lived apart, but they would have come together in Jerusalem time and time again, around the different feasts and celebrations. So, it's unimaginable that they wouldn't have come together and known each other. What John *is* saying is *he did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah*.

Now stop and think about this. How hard would it be to get your mind around the fact that your cousin is God in the flesh, the long-awaited Messiah? So that's what John is saying. He did not understand that he did not know that Jesus was the Messiah. He came to baptize in water, in order to prepare the way. But the One who called him to baptize in water, meaning God, had said to him, "*When you see the Spirit of God come from heaven as a dove and land on Him and remain on Him, that will be the sign, this is the One.*" So that is what John is reflecting. It was in that moment in the baptism when the Father spoke, and the Spirit descended as a dove and remained on Him, that he realized, "This is the long-awaited Messiah!"

John was clear. His baptism was nothing more than a baptism of water. It was merely symbolic with no real power to change a life. But the One whom he was announcing would be the One who would baptize in the Spirit, He would be the One who would have the power to recreate, to regenerate, to cause one to be born again—to radically change a life from the inside out. Verse 34:

"I myself [John the Baptist] have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh. But after 30 years, this is the glorious moment where publicly John testifies that, "This One standing before us is the eternal Son of God in the flesh!"

This is the official launch of the public ministry of Jesus, that would absolutely rock the world. As a matter of fact, it would be fair to say that the world has never been the same since. John is not asking you to just believe him. Throughout John's Gospel, he will present overwhelming historical evidence that validates his claim that this is the Son of God in the flesh. John states that his purpose was to prepare the way, in order that people would receive the King. Again, I find it amazing to think that all around Jesus, in that moment, were people full of despair, people full of hopelessness, people full of fear and anxiety, people full of boredom, people who had long determined God would never keep His promise. They had no idea that, standing among them, was the One who, for hundreds of years, the people had longed for. Most would reject Him, but for those who would receive Him, their lives would never be the same again.

So fast forward 2000 years. It's really not any different. So, here's what I'm asking of you: Wherever you're at in your spiritual journey—wherever you're at—all I'm asking this morning is, “Would you be open minded enough to consider that the longings, the desires, the passions in your heart that you've tried so hard to satisfy with the things of this world, could possibly be satisfied in a person by the name of Jesus, who is right here with us, among us, this morning?” Some of you here this morning, you've never trusted Jesus as Savior. Maybe you're thinking, “I don't even know what that means. I don't understand this; I have so many questions.” I understand that; that's fine. I'm just really glad you're here. I'm not asking you to make that decision this morning. I'm just asking, “Would you be open minded enough to consider the possibility that what your soul has been longing for all these years, that you're trying to fill with so many other things, would you just consider the possibility that what your soul is looking for can only be satisfied in Jesus?”

For those of us who have trusted Jesus as Savior, wouldn't it be true we still have longings and desires? There's nobody in the room that could say, “I've arrived.” There are still longings and passions and desires within us. All I'm asking is, “Would you consider the possibility that God could open your eyes to Jesus in ways you've never seen Him before...that Jesus might satisfy your deepest longings in ways you've never known before? Would you at least consider that possibility in the weeks and the months to come?”

These things have been written, that you might believe and, in believing, you might find life.

Our Father, we're just so thankful that when we were lost and dead in our sin, behold, the Lamb of God came to take away the sin of the world. Lord, my prayer is in the weeks and months to come, You'd give us eyes to see and ears to hear, that we might see Jesus in ways we have never seen Him before, and that there we might find the fullness of life that our souls long for, in whose Name we pray, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. What are common longings and desires that you or others have that seem to at least hint that you were made for something different and something more than this world?
2. Try to imagine what it would have been like to wait for hundreds of years for the promised Messiah while you and the people around you struggle in bondage and pain. What does it feel like to wait and wait for God to do something in the midst of painful circumstances? What might have been some of the emotions of the Jewish people before Jesus was announced?

Bible Study

1. Read John 1:19-23. What is happening in these verses? How could John have exploited the attention for his own gain? How do people exploit the message of Jesus today for personal gain?
2. What was John the Baptist's role according to 1:23?
3. Read John 1:24-28. How does John describe the One he was called to announce? What does he mean by "among you stands One whom you do not know?" What if everything they were looking for could be found in a person who was among them, but they did not know Him. How might this same thing happen today?
4. Read John 1:29-34. What do you think of when you hear the words, "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?"
5. Compare John's testimony with Matthew 3. What did John witness and what did John understand as a result?
6. Compare John's (the writer) introduction in 1:1-3, 14. What was John's claim and what did he witness? What is his conclusion in 1:34?

