

John 1 v 19 to 51: “Come and see...”

John the Baptist’s message (John 1 v 19 to 28)

- Crowds from around Jerusalem were flocking to the river Jordan, to be baptized by John. So the Jewish leaders sent a delegation to ask John who he was. Who did they think he might be? Why?
- How does John the Baptist describe his own ministry and his relationship to Jesus? Why did John baptize (v 25)?

“Now this was John’s testimony” (v 19) – we have already seen that John the Baptist came as a witness (John 1 v 7), and that he testified concerning Jesus (John 1 v 15). Now we learn what his testimony was. “I am not the Christ” (v 20) – with emphasis, John told the Jewish leaders who he was not. He did not come to focus attention on himself, because he was not the Messiah: his mission was to point people to Jesus.

“Are you Elijah?” (v 21) – it would have been easy for the Jewish leaders to associate John with Elijah because of his personality, and because of the promise that Elijah would come before the ‘Day of the Lord’ (Malachi 4 v 5, 6). John was careful never to say that he was Elijah; yet Jesus noted that in a sense, John *was* Elijah, ministering in the office and spirit of Elijah (Matthew 11 v 13, 14; Mark 9 v 11 to 13; see Luke 1 v 13 to 17). “Are you the Prophet?” – God had promised that another prophet would come in due time (Deuteronomy 18 v 15 to 19). The Jewish leaders wondered if John was that prophet.

“I am the voice of one calling in the desert” (v 23) – quoting from Isaiah 40 v 3, John explained his mission: to “make straight the way for the Lord”. His baptism prepared people, cleansing them and getting them ready for the coming King. The religious leaders wanted to know who John was, but John did not want to answer that question. Instead, he wanted to talk about his mission: to prepare the way for the Messiah.

“Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ...?” (v 25) – the Pharisees wondered about John’s authority if he was not one of the prophesied ones they had in mind, but John’s work of baptizing perfectly suited his calling. “I baptize with water” (v 26) – John’s baptism demonstrated a humble willingness to repent and prepare for the coming Messiah. Yet John’s baptism could not help someone keep clean: Jesus’ baptism with the Holy Spirit (v 33) would achieve far more than John’s baptism.

“Among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me” (v 27) – John explained to the religious leaders that he was not the focus of his work, but the One who was already among them. John’s work was to prepare the way for Jesus. “The thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” – to untie the strap of a sandal (before foot washing) was duty of the lowest slave in the house.

The Lamb of God (John 1 v 29 to 34)

- Jesus finally appears in v 29. John the Baptist first introduces Jesus not as the Christ, or the Messiah or the Son of God, but as the ‘Lamb of God’. What is the significance of this title?
- How does John the Baptist describe Jesus’ ministry?

“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (v 29) – at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus was greeted with words declaring his destiny: his sacrificial agony and death on the cross for the sins of mankind. John did not present Jesus as a great moral example or a great teacher of holiness and love. He proclaimed Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. In this one sentence, John the Baptist summarized the greatest work of Jesus: to deal with the sin problem afflicting the whole human race.

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John used the image of the sacrificial lamb, presented many times in the Old Testament, with Jesus as the perfect fulfillment: (i) He is the lamb God would himself provide for Abraham as a substitute for Isaac (Genesis 22 v 8); (ii) He is the lamb for the guilt offering in the Levitical sacrifices (Leviticus 6 v 6); (iii) He is Isaiah's lamb that is led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53 v 7); (iv) supremely, He is the Passover lamb for Israel (Exodus 12 v 21). Each of these lambs fulfilled their role in their death; John's proclamation of Jesus as the Lamb of God was an announcement that Jesus would die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

“Because he was before me” (v 30) – John spoke of the eternal pre-existence of Jesus. John knew that Jesus was eternal, and that Jesus was God. “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit” (v 33) – God gave John the Baptist a sign so that he would recognize the Messiah: he would be the one on whom the Holy Spirit descended from heaven. John was a reliable witness, because he had confirming evidence from God. “I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (v 34) – the solemn testimony of John was that Jesus is the Son of God (see John 1 v 18).

The first disciples of Jesus (John 1 v 35 to 51)

“John was standing with two of his disciples” (v 35) – one of these two was Andrew (v 40); the other is not identified, but it is reasonable to think it was John the gospel-writer. “What are you seeking?... Come and you will see” (v 38, 39) – Jesus asked these two disciples an important and logical question – and a question he continues to ask to all people today. For the answer, Jesus directed them to himself, to live with him. “It was about the tenth hour” – he remembered the exact hour that he met Jesus. This is a subtle clue that one of the two disciples who came to Jesus was the apostle John himself...

- What was it that brought each of these men (Andrew, John, Simon, Philip, Nathanael) to Jesus? How far did they understand who Jesus was? What account of Jesus can you give to others?
- Why did Nathanael declare that Jesus was the ‘Son of God’ (verse 49)? How would you describe Nathanael's character?

“He first found his own brother” (v 41) – Andrew met Jesus, and wanted his brother Simon to meet Jesus too. This is how many people come to faith in Christ. Those who experience the joy of coming to Jesus, with life in its fulness, want to share these blessings with those closest to them. “We have found *the Messiah*” – Andrew declared that Jesus was the long expected Saviour of Israel and the world. “We have found *him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*” (v 45) – Philip declared that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, Joseph's son from Nazareth. “*You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*” (v 49) – this was Nathanael's testimony: ‘Son of God’ described Jesus' relationship to God the Father, and ‘King of Israel’ described his status as Messiah and King.

“You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (v 51) – this may be a reference to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 v 12, where Jacob saw a ladder from earth to heaven, and the angels ascending and descending upon it. Jesus meant that he was the ladder between heaven and earth. When Nathanael came to understand Jesus as the mediator or ‘ladder’ between God and man, it could truly be said, “You will see greater things than these” (v 50).

“*Son of Man*” was a reference to Daniel 7 v 13, 14 where the ‘Son of Man’ is the King of Glory who comes to judge the world. Jesus used this title often because it was a Messianic title free from political or nationalistic sentiment. When a Jewish person of that time heard ‘King’ or ‘Christ’ they often thought of a political or military deliverer...

This section shows four ways of coming to Jesus: (i) Andrew came to Jesus because of John's preaching; (ii) Peter came to Jesus because of this brother's witness; (iii) Philip came to Jesus as a result of the direct call of Jesus; (iv) Nathaniel came to Jesus as he overcame prejudice (v 46) by a personal encounter with Jesus.