

Text: John 1:29-34

Title: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because John saw Holy Spirit descend on Him"

Time: 11/5/2023 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I have read that the phrase, "You cannot see the forest for the trees," was first used in a collection of proverbs compiled by the English playwright John Heywood in 1546. In the 17th century, the proverb was used as a criticism of the Roman Catholic Pope during the reign of Charles II of England. Some under Charles's reign felt that their Anglican sovereign desired to be too much like his Roman Catholic cousin, Louis XIV of France.

In defense of English liberties, some pamphlets appeared that opposed "popery and arbitrary government." It was said in those days that the Church of Rome could not see the forest for the trees, meaning they could not see transcendent spiritual truth due to their desire for earthly civil power.

When it comes to the good news of Jesus Christ, the Apostle John wants his readers to see the forest, not just the trees. At the ACCC Convention two weeks ago, I was assigned to do a workshop on the Jesus People, the Christian hippie movement of the 1970s. The Jesus People focused on copying many of the details of what they believed were a part of Jesus's earthly life.

He had no place to of His own to lay His head, so they lived in communes. He seemed to retire from carpentry, so they quit their jobs to avoid participation in the evils of capitalism. They went barefoot, grew long hair, and wore long beards because they believed Jesus looked like that. From my study of the movement, they seemed only to call our Lord "Jesus," but never "Christ." By way of contrast, the purpose of John's Gospel is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so have life through His name (John 20:31).

In other words, the purpose of John's Gospel is to bring the forest into prominence in our understanding of the life of Jesus. He wants us to know the transcendent meaning of this unique man's life. He wants us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and so to have life in His name - His whole name, with none of it left out.

In our passage John the Apostle again tells us why we must conclude that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descend on Him.

We have seen already how the Apostle John relies on the ministry of John the Baptist to prove his point about Jesus being the Christ. He does so again in these verses by noticing three ways in which John the Baptist saw the forest rather than just the trees when it came to Jesus (vv. 29, 32, 34). John sees three things about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

I. John saw that Jesus is the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world (vv. 29-31).

Illustration: Savyfarmlife.com provides online their "Ultimate Sheep Behavior Guide." Their guidance is based on two important facts about sheep: (1) they are social animals; and (2) they are prey animals. Lots of predators in the wild enjoy the taste of sheep.

As prey animals, sheep are one of the more defenseless animals on the planet. They are good at suspecting danger and flocking together, but they cannot do much on their own to defend themselves. And the most defenseless kind of sheep is a young sheep, the lamb.

Application: John calls Jesus "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (v. 29). Our text begins with a chronological marker - "on the next day." Commentators

agree that the chronology puts this day after the baptism of Christ by John, at which the Holy Spirit descended on Him and the voice from heaven declared, "You are My beloved Son."

Next the Spirit of God drove Him into the wilderness where after fasting for 40 days, Jesus endured direct temptation from Satan. So it is after that colossal victory over His enemy that John calls Jesus the Lamb of God.

Jesus was not by nature a defenseless lamb, but He was without defense as the Lamb of God by virtue of the Father's will. Israelites brought their own lambs to their sacrifices, but in this case the Lamb is being provided by God. Jesus is the *Lamb of God* in this sense.

Abraham told Isaac in Gen. 22:8 that God would provide Himself a Lamb. And when He did so on Mount Moriah, the Lord was showing us all what He would do for sinners by providing His own Son as a defenseless lamb to take away our sin by dying on the cross in our place.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of this Lamb of God: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (53:6-7). "Well might the sun in darkness hide and shut its glories in, when Christ the mighty Maker died for man the creature's sin" - Isaac Watts.

In Acts 8 an Ethiopian traveling back home from Pentecost was reading that passage in his precious Isaiah scroll. The Lord brought the evangelist Philip to him, and the Ethiopian asked Philip a question, "Of whom does the prophet speak" when he writes of this Lamb? Philip knew the answer. He

“opened his mouth and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”

The Ethiopian finally saw the forest clearly. He believed that his sins were taken away by Jesus, who is the Christ of Isaiah 53, the Lamb of God. Believing, he received life in His name.

Has that happened to you? God’s prophets, Isaiah and John, are telling us this morning: “the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all” and the Lamb of God takes away “the sins of the world.” *Us all* and *the world* include you and me. Do you believe? Do you want to be baptized like the Ethiopian?

If you do believe, the Apostle Peter reminds us that those who have had their sins taken away should be people who live for God in holiness and worship Him in fear: “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:16-19).

It is impossible to live an unholy life and irreverently skip worship to earn more silver and gold without also failing to see the forest for the trees, that Jesus is the Lamb of God who shed blood to take away our sins. He is worthy of our holy fear.

The Lamb of God appears also in the book of Revelation. In that book, the Greek word refers to something even more defenseless than the word *lamb* in our passage. It is a word meaning *little lamb*, and it is used of the one who comes the second time in judgment. When in chapter 5, the Apostle John turns to see the Lion of the tribe of Judah, he sees the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world (5:6, 13:8). God’s

plan to save sinners from their sin with this Lamb is an eternal plan. John the Baptist says so in our passage as well (v. 30). So, can we see by faith the Christ-forest this morning? Do we believe what John the Baptist believed, that the Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world?

II. John saw that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (vv. 32-33).

Illustration: Occasionally, we will get a text from one of our kids that includes a picture of our grandkids. Those are precious to us. We do not merely glance at those pictures. We do more than notice them while reaching for the delete button. We gaze at them for a time; we enjoy all the cute details and comment back and forth about the degree of cuteness we are discovering; and we make sure we save them in a safe place to look at them again.

Application: When John the Baptist bears record with the words *I have seen* in v. 32, he uses a verbal form (the perfect tense) that one commentator said “reflects a settled conviction” (Carson). Another said about John’s vision: “[The word means] ‘gazed on,’ with calm, steady, thoughtful gaze, as fully measuring what was presented to my eyes” (Westcott). John is describing a life changing contemplation that affected him in an ongoing way when he says, “I have seen.”

And what he had seen was the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus Christ like a dove and remaining on Him (v. 32). John was baptizing in water, but this One would baptize in the Holy Spirit (v. 33). He did so at Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5, 11:15-17).

Heretofore, the Spirit had come upon prophets enabling them to speak the Word of God from time to time (Elisha, 2 Kings 3:15), but when it comes to Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and remained because He is the Christ, the Son of God. He not only speaks the Word of God, but also He is the

Word of God. Westcott: “[The Spirit] ‘abode’ on Christ so that from henceforth that which was immanent in the ‘Word’ – His ‘glory’ – was continuously manifested to believers.”

Peter speaks of this glory as he gives the gospel to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10:34-43. Peter must have had the prophet Isaiah especially in mind when he says, “all the prophets” (v. 43):

Isa. 11:1-2, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And 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.”

Isa. 42:1, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.”

Isa. 61:1-2a, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Do you believe the prophets about your need for the remission or forgiveness of your sins? Have you gazed upon what John the Baptist gazed upon in a life-changing way? Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove.

III. John saw that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 34).

Application: The voice from heaven that John heard when the Spirit descended on Jesus after His baptism announced, “This

is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." The voice of God on that day fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 2:7:

"I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, 'Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.'"

Today, those nations rage against the Lord and His anointed Son, imagining vainly that they can dethrone their sovereign Lord. The Psalm recognizes that sad truth, and it ends with sage advice for these rebels:

"Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (vv. 10-12).

Are you one of these kings of the earth? Have you dethroned the God of heaven, preferring rather to be your own king and your own judge? John the Baptist knew that would not work. He saw that Jesus is the Son of God, the Son of Psalm 2, the beloved Son of the heavenly Father. He was wise, instructed, serving with fear, rejoicing with trembling, kissing and trusting. John could see that Jesus is the Son of God. Can we?

Conclusion: Can we see the forest and not just the trees when it comes to Jesus? Do we see what John the Baptist saw? Has it changed our lives the way it changed his? Each of us needs to see who Jesus truly is and what He has done.

A couple of times in our passage, John remembers the time when he could not see what he sees in this passage. All his life he had been blind to the forest, picking up only a few scattered trees of truth about the Coming One.

Perhaps that is where you have been for some time now. It was the Lord who opened the eyes of John, who helped him see Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and to find life in His name. This he could not see on his own. The Lord will help you see too if you truly want Him to. Ask Him for that help this morning.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the One upon Whom the Holy Spirit descended and remained, and the Son of God. Martin Luther saw this Christ-forest and concluded:

“Sin has but two places where it may be; either it may be with you, so that it lies upon your neck, or upon Christ, the Lamb of God. If now it lies upon your neck, you are lost; if, however, it lies upon Christ, you are free and will be saved. Take now whichever you prefer” [quoted in Lenski, 129-130].

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*