

# The Lamb of God

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[0:00] Well, I had a birthday a couple of weeks ago, trying to forget it as much as possible, because the older I get, the more I want to keep my birthdays quiet. But despite this, I did manage to get a number of cards, so thank you to those who gave me birthday cards.

They not only reminded me of my age, a big number, but they also reminded me of who I am. It sounds a strange thing to say, but I am a husband, a father, a son, a son-in-law, an uncle, a brother-in-law, a friend, a colleague, and a pastor.

I love the way you get birthday cards for pastors. Niche market, I'm sure. But the point is, I've got all of these different titles that all come together. Of course, my name is Jonathan DeGroot, but all these other titles build up a picture of who I am.

They express my identity. Now, John has already introduced Jesus to us. If you were here last week, we saw that in the prologue, John 1, verse 1 to 18.

Next, what John does is he moves on to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus in this world. And as he does so, he gives a number of different titles for Jesus in the conversations that we listen to.

[1:16] And they explain who Jesus is, but also what Jesus came to do. Now, most of these titles come from the Old Testament part of the Bible.

And so, in John 1, verse 19 through to 51, Jesus is called these things. So, just look down if you've got a Bible open. If you don't, you might find it useful. 1-0-6-3 is the page.

But Jesus is called there the Lamb of God, verse 29 and verse 36. He's called God's chosen one, verse 34. He's called the Messiah, verse 41.

He's called the Son of God, verse 49. He's called the King of Israel, verse 49. And he's called the Son of Man, verse 51. As well as, verse 45, the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote.

And then in verse 51, there's this bit about Jacob's ladder. But basically, the theme running through all of this passage and all of these verses is that all of God's promises in the Old Testament are fulfilled in this person, this man, Jesus.

[2:27] Jesus has arrived and he's taking God's salvation plan onto the next stage. And so, we're going to look at this long section today in basically three parts.

The section itself comes in two parts. There's the witness of John the Baptist and then what happens as a result of that. But in these verses, basically, we see what John's purpose is.

John's purpose in chapter 20, verse 13, 31 is to tell us that Jesus is the Messiah. He's the Son of God. And that by believing in him, we have life in his name.

And so, we'll follow the flow of this passage under these three headings. First, the witness to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Second, the witness to Jesus as the Messiah of God.

And then third, the witness to Jesus as the Son of God. So, first, the witness to Jesus as the Lamb of God, verse 19 to 34.

[3:29] So, this man, John the Baptist, he is established as a witness to Jesus. Just like someone would be a witness to something they've seen in a court of law. So, John is a witness to what he's seen about Jesus.

But before we get to what he says, just notice something interesting here that John, the author of the gospel, deliberately does. He basically is telling us that all of this action is taking place over one week.

So, just look at how he introduces the different sections, if your Bible's open. Verse 29, he says, the next day. Verse 35, he says, the next day.

Verse 43, he says, the next day. And then if you look down to chapter 2, verse 1, on the third day. So, that's three days after. So, basically, this is the first week of the ministry of Jesus.

And it might be that John, just like he did at the very beginning. Remember when he said, in the beginning was the Word. It was an echo back to the creation in Genesis.

[ 4 : 36 ] It might be that John wants to echo the creation week here. As if to say, at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, this is as momentous as the creation itself.

Because the new creation is now taking place now that Jesus has arrived. And so, Jesus is the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world.

And Jesus is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. He'll open up the way to heaven. He's the Messiah who will rule God's people forever. So, John's saying, Jesus has arrived.

It's a big deal. And he's arrived because he's doing what the next stage of God's purposes are. And so, as John the Baptist is introduced, chapter 1, verse 6 to 8, as a witness to the light, what John's doing now is his job.

And at the beginning of our reading, verse 19, John is being questioned and challenged about who he is by the Jewish religious leaders. Because there was an expectation in Judaism that the Messiah was coming.

[ 5 : 48 ] And obviously, these leaders noticed something special and different about John, John the Baptist. And so, they questioned him. But he denies that he is the Messiah.

So, who is he? Because these leaders are thinking, how dare you speak as if you represent God? That's our job.

But John says, verse 23, he's the one that the prophet Isaiah spoke about. John replied, in the words of Isaiah the prophet, I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, make straight the way for the Lord.

So, John's purpose is to prepare the way for the Messiah, for Jesus. So, Isaiah promised this new exodus when God would rescue his people, where God's king, the Messiah, who would also be the suffering servant, would come and he would carry out God's rescue plan for the world.

And so, John's job is basically to point out who the Messiah is. In a sense, to shine the light on Jesus Christ, to magnify him, to help people see, here is the Messiah.

[ 7 : 01 ] He's arrived. It's as if John's like a spotlight operator in a theater performance, where he is behind the scenes in the darkness, not focusing the attention on himself, but focusing the attention on the main character who's center stage.

That's what John is doing by focusing the light on Jesus. He wants people to see Jesus. That's why he says, verse 26 and 27, I baptize with water, but among you stands one you don't know.

He's the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. John's saying, guys, Jesus is among us.

He's here. He's arrived. And John's witness to Jesus is his identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God. So, verse 29 says, the next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, you might be thinking, why is Jesus given this title Lamb of God?

[ 8 : 12 ] John's readers or anyone, any one of us who's read any of the Old Testament part of the Bible, will not have failed to see that lambs, sheep keep coming up again and again.

We just sang, the Lord is my shepherd. So, what's the deal with lambs all the way through the Bible? Well, they're significant in so many places. In the story of Abraham in Genesis chapter 22, when he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac, we read that God provided a ram to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac.

And then in the story of the Exodus, in Exodus chapter 12, there's the Passover. And the Passover lamb was sacrificed, if you remember, and its blood was painted on the door frames of the houses of God's people.

And it was there so that the judgment of God would pass over them. So, the lamb was sacrificed in place of the people. And then in the prophecy of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 53, we read about the suffering servant.

And the suffering servant was led like a lamb to the slaughter because he would die for the sins of God's people. And so, there's an obvious pattern, isn't there?

[ 9 : 31 ] When you look at the lamb all the way through the Old Testament, the lamb was always sacrificed as a substitute for the people. And so, all of this is anticipating that Jesus Christ will come.

And so, when he appears, John the Baptist says, look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It's all part of God's plan. Jesus didn't just show up out of nowhere with no identity. His coming was promised. The titles for who he is and what he would do were all said in advance. And so, salvation, God's salvation, would come through the substitutionary sacrifice of the lamb. And so, the whole Bible's message is that if we, you and me, are ever to be acceptable to God and be able to come into God's presence, it can only be on the basis of the lamb that God has provided. The lamb he's given to make atonement for my sin and your sin. Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, it's no surprise that Jesus has given this title at the very beginning of his ministry.

[ 10 : 54 ] Because Jesus came to deal with our sin. To deal with it once and for all by taking it away through his death on the cross.

Because, you see, our greatest need in life is to have our sins forgiven. We all deserve God's judgment for our sin against him.

But God has sent his son Jesus into this world to be a substitute, to stand in our place under God's judgment so that God's judgment would pass over us.

The lamb of God came to be sacrificed on the cross to pay the penalty our sin deserves. And all of this was confirmed to John the Baptist by God himself.

So just look at those verses in verse 32 to 34. John gave this testimony, I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, the man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

[ 12 : 06 ] I have seen and I testify that this is God's chosen one. So at the baptism of Jesus, which we read about in the other Gospels, God confirms that this human being, Jesus, is his son.

And so the Spirit came down from heaven and remained on Jesus. It's the anointing of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

So this is all an anticipation of what we find in Acts chapter 2 about the Spirit being poured out at Pentecost, which means that the Holy Spirit who came upon Jesus for his ministry is the same Holy Spirit with whom we are baptized as his people.

Isn't that amazing? The Spirit that God anointed Jesus with at his baptism is the same Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts if we are a believer.

So the Lamb of God not only takes away our sin, but he fills us with his Spirit. And so that's our first point, the witness to Jesus as the Lamb of God.

[ 13 : 23 ] The second is the witness to Jesus as the Messiah of God. Verse 35 to 42. So this is through the witness of Andrew, who you'll notice is the first named follower of Jesus.

And Andrew, in verse 41, is the one who identifies Jesus as the Messiah. So how does it come about? We read about it in verse 35 and 36.

John's witness to Jesus as the Lamb of God prompts two disciples to follow Jesus. One of these disciples is Andrew and possibly the other is John, the author of the gospel.

First of all, they call Jesus Rabbi, means teacher. And then verse 39, notice that they spend the day with Jesus. Have you ever wondered what happened on that day to convince these men that as they hang out with Jesus, that Jesus is the Messiah, that God has long promised?

It wasn't that Jesus did any miracles because John tells us the first miracle is beginning of chapter two, the water into wine. And yet being with Jesus on that day convinced Andrew that he had met the Messiah.

[ 14 : 42 ] So verse 40, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, we have found the Messiah, that is the Christ, and he brought him to Jesus.

So what does this title Messiah mean? Well, outside of the Bible, you sometimes hear the word Messiah being used. Most recently, I heard it being used to refer to Martin O'Neill, the current manager of Celtic Football Club.

because when this season, Celtic were having a bad time and losing every game, when Martin O'Neill returned to Celtic, it was hailed as, this is the return of the Messiah.

He was coming to stabilize the club, to win a few games, to sort out the mess, and to lead them forwards into the future. Lo and behold, Celtic won the league yesterday, which we're all gutted about.

Well, maybe not all. Maybe some of us. Anyways, just in a tiny way, it helps us understand what the role of the Messiah is.

[ 15 : 56 ] It's a Hebrew title. It means the anointed one, the special one. It means God's anointed king, the one that God had promised. And so John translates it into Greek for his Greek readers by saying, Messiah also is the Christ.

And the Messiah's coming is foretold again in the Old Testament. And so God's people were waiting and waiting for the Messiah to come.

He would be the one through whom God would rule his people forever, who would take them into a much better future. And John tells us he's arrived.

And so Andrew is bearing witness to the fact that all of these promises about the Messiah and the Old Testament are realized in Jesus.

He's saying, Jesus is the one we've been waiting for. Jesus is the one who fulfills everything God has promised. Jesus is the Messiah of God.

[ 17 : 02 ] And so get this, just as Andrew was convinced about the identity of Jesus, we should be too. We should never be in any doubt about who Jesus is.

Just think of it like this. Imagine you're at the side of the road in your car and there is smoke wafting from your car engine. But it's okay because you've got a breakdown cover.

Or let's just say you're a member of the AA. Other breakdown companies are available as well. But the AA, when you phone them, they tell you, we're not far away.

Just wait where you are and we'll arrive soon. So you wait and after a little while, a bright yellow van, transit van, pulls up with two massive letters on the side.

A, A. And a bloke jumps out, high-vis jacket with a t-shirt with letters on his arm, AA. And he opens your car bonnet, he tinkers around with a couple of tools and a few minutes later you're on your way, driving down the road.

[ 18 : 14 ] And later on you just explain to somebody what happened to you and they ask you, how do you know that that guy who turned up was actually from the AA?

How can you be sure? And you say, well, there's absolutely no doubt that he was from the AA. He didn't maybe say it in so many words, but the AA promised he'd come and I waited and he arrived and he did his job and he fixed the problem and then he left.

And so it is with Jesus, the Messiah, God promised that he would come, people were waiting, Jesus arrived, he did his job fixing the problem through his death and through his resurrection and then he left.

And so what I'm saying is we've got all of the evidence we need to be convinced about the true identity of Jesus. So whether it's the witness of John the Baptist or of Andrew or of the gospel writer John, there is no doubt that this man, Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, the man who lived in history, no doubt that he is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Okay, thirdly, the witness to Jesus as the Son of God, verse 43 to 51. And it's through the witness of this man called Nathaniel that Jesus is identified as the Son of God there in verse 49.

[ 19 : 48 ] So how does this come about? Because what happens here is that Jesus now takes center stage in the narrative, in the story of the gospel of John.

And he calls Philip to follow him. And again, Philip's response is focused on the identity of Jesus. Look at verse 45.

Philip found Nathaniel and told him, we have found the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.

So Philip, again, is convinced that Jesus is the one the Old Testament scriptures are speaking about. And so what Philip does is he rocks up to his mate Nathaniel and he says, Nathaniel, guess who I've just met?

The one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph, he's here. He's down the street.

[ 20 : 57 ] I've seen him. He called me to follow him and I do. And it's another massive claim that Philip makes here.

because after all the waiting, God's promised king, the one who fulfills all of these scriptures, shows up. But Philip's words are met with Nathaniel's skeptical response.

Look at verse 46. Nazareth, can anything good come from there? Nathaniel asked. Come and see, said Philip. So Nazareth was a tiny, obscure village.

It's not even mentioned in the Old Testament. So nobody was thinking that the Messiah would have any connection with Nazareth. But Philip, the good mate that he is, gets Nathaniel to Jesus to see for himself.

And so what happens? Verse 47. When Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching, he said of him, here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit. How do you know me?

[ 22 : 08 ] Nathaniel asked. Jesus answered, I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you. There's so much that we don't know about this conversation.

Like, what does Jesus mean? And what did Jesus see when he saw Nathaniel under the fig tree? And we could spend ages discussing it, but I reckon the point is really quite simple.

And the point is this, Jesus knew Nathaniel through and through. Because it's Jesus' knowledge of Nathaniel that catches Nathaniel completely off guard.

And Nathaniel's thinking, how can this stranger who I've never seen before, never met before, how does he know so much about me?

How can he speak and it pierces my heart? How is he aware of what I've been doing and what I'm like? And it's this supernatural insight of Jesus into Nathaniel's heart and his life that convinces him of Jesus' identity.

[ 23 : 22 ] So he says in verse 49, that Nathaniel declared, Rabbi, you are the son of God, you are the king of Israel. He recognized that this man speaking to him, Jesus, knew him in a way that only God could know him.

And as we get close to Jesus, we find that as well, don't we? Jesus, it's like he looks right into our hearts. He sees us for who we are.

And he speaks to us in such a way that we recognize our need of him. And that's what happens with Nathaniel. And so he confesses that Jesus is the son of God.

Notice that he moves from doubt, he's skeptical, but he moves through to sure and certain faith, to belief in Jesus. But as amazing as this belief was for Nathaniel, when he meets Jesus, Jesus tells them that there's far more to come.

And it's with this we end, verse 50 and 51. Jesus said, you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that. He then added, very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.

[ 24 : 50 ] What's going on here? Well, what Jesus is talking about is the experience of a man called Jacob in the Old Testament. In Genesis chapter 28, Jacob had this dream of a ladder or of a staircase or a stairway.

And it connected where Jacob was lying on the ground, on earth, all the way up to heaven above. And in his dream, angels were ascending and descending on this ladder.

And now what Jesus is saying to Nathaniel is that he is that ladder. Jesus is this connection between earth and heaven.

He's saying that through his life and death and resurrection, he'll be opening up the kingdom of heaven to everyone who believes.

In other words, Jesus is saying here that he is the one who gives you and me and people like Nathaniel and everybody else access to God.

[ 25 : 57 ] Put it this way, Jesus came down from heaven to earth to take us to heaven. Okay, now that we've got John and Andrew and Philip and Nathaniel, all these guys have been witnesses to Jesus.

They've identified Jesus through these different titles that are his from the Old Testament. And now that they've done that, what happens next, just at the end here, is that Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man.

And it's a title that Jesus often uses throughout the Gospels to refer to himself. And of course, it affirms Jesus' humanity. Jesus was a man.

But it's also a title that comes from the Old Testament. Because by calling himself the Son of Man, Jesus associates himself with this figure, this heavenly figure in Daniel chapter 7, who's called the heavenly Son of Man.

And he's the one to whom God gives authority and glory and sovereign power over all peoples. And this heavenly Son of Man in the Old Testament will appear at the end of history, on the clouds of heaven, and he will judge and rule forever.

[ 27 : 26 ] And so Jesus is saying that that's him. That, as we read it today, Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose again, but it's not finished there because one day Jesus will return.

The Son of Man will come. And he's the fulfillment of all that God has promised. He's God's Messiah. He's the Lamb of God who came to die for our sin and to draw together a people, the church, as his very own.

And so when Jesus entered into this world, you'll notice that from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, Jesus called people to follow him.

And he did. His summons to follow me rang out persuasively for all of these people away back then. But his summons, follow me, still rings out persuasively today.

Because the invitation to follow Jesus goes out to everyone. And I know for some of you that you've heard that invitation and in recent times you have decided to follow Jesus.

[ 28 : 42 ] us. Just like Andrew and Peter and Philip and Nathaniel. And they're all very different characters, aren't they? But the invitation comes to people like us.

Whoever we are, whatever our background, whether we've been to church a million times or we've been about four times, the invitation from Jesus to follow him is for us.

us. And it's for us whether we sense our need or not. It's for us whether we continue to be skeptical. It's for us if we're just curious about it all.

What John does in his gospel is introduce us to the original Jesus so that we can see him for who he really is. Why?

So that we would respond to him as we really should. because when we get close to Jesus, I mean when we spend time with Jesus investigating him as we read about him in the Bible, we will become convinced that he is the Messiah, that he is the Son of God.

[ 29 : 59 ] And when we make that discovery, then we can do no other than to follow him, to give our lives wholeheartedly to him. let me just tell you the story of one man who did just that.

Because you might be thinking, well, yeah, Jonathan, you don't realize how hard it would be for me to follow Jesus. It would be costly and difficult. Well, let me tell you about this man.

He's called Nabeel Qureshi. And Nabeel Qureshi was a Pakistani American who was raised in a devout Muslim family. And he valued his faith, his identity as a Muslim, but he converted to Christianity.

And he's written a book about it. He's passed away, sadly, now. But in his book called Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus, he basically explains how his conversion came about.

It came about as a result of years and years of study, learning about Jesus, debating with other Christians, about Jesus, questioning, praying, personal searching, until he came to realize that Jesus is the Messiah.

[ 31 : 14 ] He's the Son of God and so he has to follow him. And he summarizes his journey with these words. He says, I left Islam because I studied Muhammad's life. I accepted the gospel because I studied Jesus' life.

And you'd imagine it came at enormous personal cost for him. in terms of his family relationships, his relationships with his friends, it was difficult. He describes his conversion as the most painful thing he ever did.

But he could do no other. After investigating Jesus, after looking into who Jesus is, he realized everything the Bible says about Jesus, all of these titles that are given to Jesus, all of this is true.

And so the application for John's readers back then was that through his gospel, people would see that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God, and so would believe and follow Jesus.

And the application for us today is really no different. We too should hear all of this witness to Jesus. And we should be persuaded that Jesus is who all these different titles tell us he is.

[ 32 : 37 ] And so like the first disciples, we too should believe and follow Jesus. That's the main application of all of this. You must believe and follow Jesus.

I must believe and follow Jesus. But of course the follow on when we've done that is that we also must bear witness to Jesus.

Telling other people to look to him. Sharing what we have seen and what we know about Jesus. Inviting people to come and see Jesus for themselves.

And to discover that by believing in him, and our lives will be changed forever. Let's pray together. that was the one who who has the one who who has the one who who has the one who who has the one who who has the one who who has the one who who has the one

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