



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 1:29-34

“John the Baptist and the Son of God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for today is John chapter 1 verse 29 through verse 34. So, if you have your Bibles turn with us to John chapter 1, and we continue reading the testimony of John the Baptist to the Lord Jesus Christ. The subject this morning is “John the Baptist and the Son of God.” It is a continuation of the testimony of the Baptist that he gave as our Lord’s ministry begins. John chapter 1 and verse 29,

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man who is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bore witness, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bore witness that this is the Son of God.”

Now for the sake of the clarity in our minds concerning the testimony of John the Baptist and the events to which he refers remember this the Lord Jesus came to be baptized by John the Baptist as a faithful Israelite, and I'm sure you remember the interview that followed when John the Baptist seeing our Lord coming to him to be baptized, tried to prevent him, saying, “I have need to be baptized of Thee and comest Thou to me, and Jesus answered John and said, ‘Permit it to be so for now for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.’” And so John then consented and baptized the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when he was baptized he came up out of the water and the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God descended upon our Lord like a dove and it lighted upon him. And then the voice came from heaven, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” And following that our Lord was tested for forty days in the wilderness, and it is likely that this particular interview referred to in John chapter 1 is that which occurred as our Lord returned from the forty days in the wilderness. The next day, John seeth Jesus coming unto him.” And the words that John gives here are the words that reflect back on that interview that he had with the Lord Jesus at the time that he baptized him. So let us remember these things when we come to the message. They will help us to have clear in our minds the parts of the events to which he refers.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

[prayer removed from audio]

[Message] There are different kinds of sermons, so a Baptist preacher from North Carolina has told us. He says there is the cotton candy sermon, very sweet and full of air, but when bitten into nothing's there. There is the stuffed olive sermon, I think I've preached some of these, pleasantly fashioned, pleasingly tart, stuffed with intellect, but no heart. There is the Jello sermon, I've heard some of these, shaking, prancing, quivering

preaching, lots of action, but very low in Spiritual calories, very colorful, but not very nourishing. There is the left-over turkey sermon. [Laughter] I've heard quite a few of these and given probably some too. Meat you suspect you've served before, but disguised enough that it is good for one Sunday more, [Laughter] probably served in hash form. And then the hot tamale sermon, I usually, I've not had to preach any of these in Believers Chapel. I hope I never have this particular type, but the hot tamale sermon is usually preached when the preacher is in a bad mood and takes it out on everybody. It's not a sermon about heaven but rather the other place. I have preached about the other place, of course. The buttered toast sermon designed for special groups such as pulpit committees, and then the last one he calls a cup of coffee sermon, but I'm not really sure exactly what he means by this, which is of course typical of some sermons I've preached. “I wonder what in the world he was talking about this morning,” is the usual comment. But anyway he calls it a cup of coffee sermon usually preached during stewardship campaigns.

The other night we attended a get together of one of the Bible classes in the chapel, and a young lady who listens to the radio on Sunday mornings here in Dallas but goes to another church, a Methodist church in the city where they do not have a whole lot of ministry of the word, it's interesting that her husband is not a Christian, but he's the one that reminds her that I come on at 8:00, and he will say to her, I don't think he's ever been here, I hope he's not here this morning. Well I hope he is here this morning, [Laughter] but anyway he says to her, “Aren't you going to listen to S. Lewis this morning?” and so, she cuts it on. But anyway she said in her church she said when we get together we always have somebody get up and get in the pulpit, one of the deacons or something, who says now come, she said it with her left hand, come on folks now we've got to give some more.” So I guess that's what this is, “cup of coffee sermon usually preached during stewardship campaigns, an attempt is made to get those who listen to share the inner flavor of their lives with others. It usually perks people up for a day or so then leaves

them feeling soaked and thoroughly bitter the next day because they have not given their all.

And then what the world needs according to this Baptist minister is manna from heaven sermons, which are recognizable because they feature, “Thus sayeth the Lord,” packed with vitamins and iron. Such sermons strengthen the person internally; put a smile on his face, and rosiness in his cheeks. Now I’ve always thought that doctrine was good for you but I really never knew that it put rosiness in your cheeks. So, how are you cheeks this morning? Rosy? Well weather like this puts it in there anyway, so I guess good doctrine is like cold weather. Both put rosiness in your cheeks.

This morning we are looking at the remainder of John the Baptist testimony and it is in a sense a testimony to the Lord Jesus particularly. The Baptist’s testimony to Jesus Christ is really a rather appropriate backdrop against which to consider the person and work of the hero of Christmas, the Lord Jesus Christ. And as you look through these verses that I’ve read for the Scripture reading this morning, you notice that John sees the Lord Jesus in three great offices. He sees him as redeemer. He says, “Behold the lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.” Then he sees him anointed by the Holy Spirit and thus as King Messiah. And finally he sees him as Son of God, one who partakes of the very nature of God and thus the Lord. These three offices of redeemer, King Messiah and Lord may correspond to those three familiar offices of the Lord Jesus Christ of priest, King and prophet. And particularly that last as prophet for after all the stress in the opening verses in the prologue of John has been upon the Lord Jesus as the Son who reveals the Father. He’s the word. He’s the word who became flesh, and furthermore in seeing him we saw him as one possessed of the glory of a unique Son of the Father, and then in verse 18 it is said of him that he has exegeted the Father, the Son who is in the bosom of the Father. So the term Son of God looks at him as the prophet. So we have him here as the priest. We have him here as the King, and we have him here as the prophet.

We have in these verses as I mentioned first, the continuation of John the Baptist testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now in the first part of his testimony which began at verse 19, John emphasized the relationship that he bore to the Lord Jesus, so it was a testimony to himself and to his status as the ambassador of the King. But here in verse 29 through verse 34, he concentrates almost all of his attention upon the Lord Jesus himself. And we're just going to look at him as the Lamb of God, as the Messiah King or King Messiah, and then as Son of God for these are the three things that John stresses in his testimony.

John evidently sees the Lord Jesus returning from the temptation, forty days in the wilderness, after John the Baptist had baptized him, and so John the Apostle writing about it says the next day John, that is John the Baptist, seeth Jesus coming unto him after forty days in the wilderness whereby the power of the Holy Spirit he overcame Satan and the tests which were put to him. John the Baptist sees him coming to him and he cries out, “Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.”

I'm sure that as a Bible reader you probably looking at this would not have a great deal of difficulty with the expression “Lamb of God.” I just imagine that if you've read the Bible much and if someone asked you, what is meant by the expression the “Lamb of God?” You would probably say, “Well the Old Testament taught that one was coming who would offer a sacrifice for the sins of sinners.” And in the Old Testament there were pictures of this and the picture is the picture of the Lamb of God, and you probably would go back to the Passover event and think about the slaughter of the lamb and how the lamb was the means of the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage to Pharaoh.

Scholars however when they look at something like this like to be absolutely sure of the meanings of expressions if they possibly can and to also be very careful in the exegesis of the text and in the references of New Testament terms. It might surprise some of you at least to know that different opinions have been given of the meaning of the

expression “Lamb of God.” Now let’s dispense with the expression “of God.” Let’s just say because we don't want to enter into too technical a discussion that “of God” means provided by God. In other words, the Lamb of God is the lamb provided by God, of God” in the sense that he is the origin of the gift of the lamb. But what is meant by the expression “The Lamb of God?”

One of the most conservative of New Testament commentators, Leon Morris, has written a very fine commentary on the Gospel of John, a relatively recent one, published about 10 years ago. Morris discusses this in his commentary and gives nine different interpretations of the expression “Lamb of God,” and then himself decides for a tenth. But the most important interpretations have been first, the “Lamb of God” is the apocalyptic lamb. Now we know in the Book of Revelation it is stated that in the last days the beast, the anti-christ shall arise. He shall have as one of his cohorts the false prophet who shall direct the worship of men to him, a world ruler. We know that the one behind the scenes who gives his authority and power to these two figures is Satan himself. We know also that the Book of Revelation pictures this wild beast of the anti-christ warring against the plans and purposes of God and we know that in the 17th chapter of the Book of Revelation there is a description of the final conflict in the form of a warfare between two animals, between the wild beast and then a lamb. And surprising the lamb overcomes the wild beast, for of course the lamb is a figure of speech for the Lord Jesus Christ expressing the gentleness of the Lord Jesus and also expressive of the fact that he is the sacrificial lamb.

Now commentators have suggested that when John said, “Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,” that he is really referring to that future event when the lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall in his final conflict with evil overcome, and he shall destroy sin and thus, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” means “Behold the Lamb of God who is to come, the Lord Jesus Christ and he will make an end of sin.” That is a possible interpretation of this expression. I think

there are a few weaknesses with it. In the first place the term “lamb” used here, the Greek word “amnos” is not the word that is used New Testament Book of Revelation, “arnion.” And so the terms are slightly different and furthermore the work of the lamb is I think by the wording here directed more toward salvation than towards overcoming and the destruction of sin. In other words, it is more salvific, more salvational in its thrust.

A second interpretation has been put upon this. It has been said the Lamb of God is simply the Passover lamb. “Behold the Passover lamb who taketh away the sin of the world.” I do believe that there is an important element of truth in this, and later on in this very book, John will identify the Lord Jesus as the Passover lamb for he will point out that as he hangs on the cross that not a bone of him was broken, an expression that refers in the Book of Exodus to the Passover lamb, and so he makes the identification, the apostle does, of the Lord Jesus with the Passover lamb. Then in the 5th chapter of the Book of Revelation the lamb there is a lamb who is slain, and as a result of being slaughtered he purchases with his blood some, not all, some from every tribe, kindred, tongue and nation, using the partitive expression indicative of the fact that the death of Christ is directed to people from every tribe, kindred, tongue, and nation, or to the world, not everybody but people from the whole of the world. And they are made kings and priests.

Now any interpretation of Lamb of God it seems to me must include that. But there is another passage in the Old Testament that is I think probably the passage that John the Baptist had in mind. Remember John said that he was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, and he identified his ministry with a statement from the Book of Isaiah where remember in Isaiah the prophet has the forerunner of the Lord Jesus saying, ‘I’m the voice of one that crieth in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord.’ John says, “I am that voice.” So in the later part of the Book of Isaiah he puts himself as the forerunner of the Messianic King. Well shortly after that in the Book of Isaiah there are these wonderful stories of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, one who is Jehovah himself, and yet the same

time the servant of Jehovah and his ministry is a ministry of suffering on the way to Kingship, on the way to authority.

Now in fact in Isaiah chapter 52 and verse 7 the prophet speaking of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah in figurative form says of him, “And as a sheep before her shearers is dumb,” but just before that something even more significant. He says, “He was a pressed and he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” So, the Suffering Servant of Jehovah is likened to a lamb brought to the slaughter. Where did Isaiah get that figure of the lamb brought to the slaughter?

Well it's most likely place is the Passover account in the Book of Exodus, but let's go back for a moment all the way back to the Book of Genesis when Abraham offers up Isaac as they're on their way to the top of Mount Moriah the father, Abraham and the son, Isaac, there is a little conversation that takes place between the two. You remember these rather touching words that Isaac speaks to his father, not understanding everything that's going to take place, although it's likely that Isaac was a boy in his teens at the time. As they are on their way toward the top of the mountain, Isaac speaks and says, “My father,” and Abraham said, “Here am I, my son.” And he said, “Behold the fire and the wood but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” And Abraham said, “Isaac, God will prepare himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” And they went on together. And finally they came to the place on the top of Mount Moriah that God had told Abraham about and Abraham built an alter there and he put the wood in order and then he bound Isaac, and he bound him and put him on top of the wood and laid him there as a sacrifice. He reached in took his knife and he was in the process of getting ready to slay his son and as his arm was raised there was a voice from the angel of the Lord that said unto him, “Abraham, Abraham.” He said, “Here am I.” And the angel said,

“Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from

me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.”

And so Abraham took the ram, the substitute and slew the substitute in place of Isaac.

Now of course when the Lord Jesus went to Calvary's cross there was no one to cry out, “Abraham, Abraham,” stop the sacrifice. Our Lord must go through the sacrifice. He must become the Lamb of God. He is, as Isaiah says, “Led as a lamb to the slaughter. Well then in Exodus chapter 12 Israel is told that they are to slay the lamb, put the lamb's blood upon the door posts and when the destroying angel comes through they will escape the bondage of pharaoh. So there is a lengthening testimony to the idea of lamb as sacrifice, lamb as typical of the redeemer to come, and finally in Isaiah 53 referring to the Suffering Servant he is described as a lamb led to the slaughter.

It's my opinion, and it's only an opinion of course but it's my opinion that when John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,” that John sees himself as the herald of Isaiah chapter 40 verse 3, and furthermore he sees the Lord Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, as the Passover lamb, as the antitype of the ram that was slain instead of Isaac by Abraham. In other words, the Lord Jesus is the Passover sacrifice. It is made by him in his office as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah.

Now it is striking too that when the last Passover supper took place and the new covenant was inaugurated, ideally by the blood signified by the wine, Jesus took that blood, or took that wine which symbolized the blood and he said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Now that expression “Shed for many,” is an expression derived from Isaiah chapter 53. It was our Lord's way of saying look I am the Passover lamb and also I am the one who is to do what Isaiah describes the Suffering Servant will do. That is he will offer himself for the

sins of many. So, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” He’s talking about the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. He is the Lamb of God. And the Lamb of God is a reference to him in his work as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah.

Now what about the remainder of the statement, “Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world?” What does he mean when he says, “Taketh it away or taketh away?” Well he means that he bears the sin of the world, and he bears it away by simply bearing it. That is he undergoes the punishment for the sin of the world and thus he bears it away. Now the fact that he bears the sin by the express direction of God indicates not only that he is a substitute, but also that he dies under the penalty of sin. So he’s a penal substitute, a substitute who bears penalty, penalty that was due others. It is of course required by God just as it was required that the Passover lamb be slaughtered in order that Israel may go free, just as it was required that the Suffering Servant of Jehovah be led as a lamb to the slaughter. So the Lord Jesus Christ must go to the cross at Calvary because it is necessary for the Father’s holiness and righteousness, his law to be vindicated in his dealings with men, and this the sacrifice accomplishes. So, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away,” by simply bearing the sin of the world.

Now he says, “The sin of the world,” and of course we should not pass this by without some word concerning sin. What is meant by “The sin of the world?” Well when we think of sin we tend to think of immorality. And if we are somewhat theologically minded we tend to think of sin as being selfishness or sin is rebellion. I submit to you that the Bible while it acknowledges that immorality and rebellion and selfishness is sin, does not really define sin in those terms. The Bible is more acute than that. All of those things are the effects of sin. The effect of sin is immorality. The effect of sin is rebellion against God. One of the results of sin is selfishness. But sin in Scripture is said to be unbelief. Sin is unbelief. In fact the Lord Jesus said, “I am going to pray the Father, he’s going to send you another comforter, and he’s going to carry out a work. He’s going to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment of sin because they believed not on

me.” That’s the essence of the sin of the world. Sin is unbelief. That’s the reason Adam fell. He fell and Eve fell before they ever took of the fruit. They fell in failure to believe the word of God and as a result of that they reached out and took of the fruit. Sin is unbelief. That is the essence of sin.

Incidentally, the Bible is very careful to teach this, and teaches it in many ways very, very plainly. We don't have time to talk of all of the ways of it, but when we think of the sin of the world and we think of the cruelty of the jungle out there, each animal following its own appetite, unheeding, unable to heed, any general good that might be required, well that’s the result of the unbelief of the world. And of course the law of the jungle is ten times more virulent in the case of men, a veritable fall indeed. No individual is exempt from it. If you think the law of the jungle is bad then think of the jungle of men. And the reason for it is the infection of human nature.

The thirty-nine articles of the Anglican church, a very fine theological statement, reads something like this in article nine, “Original sin standeth not in the following from Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated.” “This infection of nature doth remain.” That’s why a Christian can look at the history of the world and at current events and understand what is happening. He doesn't really puzzle over things such as we see in our newspapers today. We don't puzzle over what is happening in Poland or what is happening in the Kremlin or what is happening in West Germany or East Germany or the United States of America. We know that there is an infection of human that must manifest itself in the relationships that men and women have to one another and in the relationships that nations have to one another. Nature itself is a lesson. If you look at nature itself you see

the law of the jungle and the reason is that nature has been judged because man has been judged because man has been judged.

Bishop Gore met a friend of his who was also a preacher who was on the way to the zoo, and the Bishop turned to him and said where are you going? He said, “Well I'm going to the zoo.” And the Bishop is supposed to have replied something like this, “Oh, I do hate the zoo. It makes me an atheist in twenty minutes.” And what he meant by that was he could not understand how it is that there could be the law of the jungle among animals created by, the bishop thought, a loving God who was only a loving God. But we understand the law of the jungle. We understand it perfectly. We understand why the animals act as they do act. It's because they have been infected and affected by the sin of men, and the judgment upon men has fallen also upon the divine creation, for the creation is made subject to the emptiness and vanity to which men have been made subject.

Isn't it striking that in the light of this people can wonder about the fall? Clarence Edward McCartney was a pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg, a very famous evangelical church, and one that is today still an evangelical church down in the center of that city. Well when Mr. McCartney was there the gospel as proclaimed constantly as it is today in that church. In one of his books he mentions original sin and he said if I was to take a visitor to Pittsburg down to the point, the point in Pittsburg is the place where the two rivers come together to form the great Ohio River, and if I were to take this visitor down to this point and show them the two rivers forming the great Ohio River and he were to reply to me, “Where are the rivers?” That would be like a man hearing a sermon on the fall of man who says, “Where are the signs of the fall?” Where are fallen men? It would be even more plain for sermons on the fall of man. They should be the most easily accepted sermons of them all.

The evidences of the fall, universal tradition, strange persistence in endurance of evil, the system of education which testifies that man has a nature that makes him a

menace to society if he is not educated, all government which bears witness to the fact that human nature must be restrained, conscious the shadow of the broken law, universal presence of evil, the sea of humanity heaves and tosses casting up its mire and dirt. We see evil entrenched in our cities among the nations. We see it attack our best institutions. We see it in our own hearts. That's why we need a redeemer. “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” Unbelief with all of its effects Jesus Christ died for.

But, now what about the statement, “The sin of the world?” “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” What is meant by that? Now, of course it cannot mean that the sin of the world totally is removed. In that case we would have Universalism and it's the Lord Jesus himself who later on in this very book says, of certain men, “You shall die in your sins.” So the sins of the world is not a Universalistic teaching. He is not teaching Universalism. “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

Others say, “Well it's Universal Atonement.” That is it's an atonement that is made for everyone. Well, I must confess there are many of my good friends who hold to this that “He taketh away the sin of the world,” in the sense of the world can be saved if they believe. He takes away the sin of the world. But there is no indication in this text that it is conditional at all. He says, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” not who can take it away, or who takes it away if, but “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away.” It is effectual, effectual atonement, not conditional atonement, effectual atonement. Never in the New Testament do we have conditional atonement, atonement if. So, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” We therefore cannot find the solution in Universalism. We cannot find the solution in Universal Atonement, but if we look at the context there is a ready solution at hand. John came in order that he might manifest the Lord Jesus to Israel. That's what he says in verse 31, “And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come

baptizing with water.” The Lord Jesus said that he was not sent to the Gentiles. He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but then later on when Israel rejects him the message goes out to the Gentiles, and in fact an apostle is selected by the Lord God to be an apostle to the Gentiles, so that the salvation which was directed toward the nation becomes a salvation directed toward the world.

Now that is what is meant by, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,” not simply the sins of Jews, but the sins of Jews and Gentiles. Not all of them, but all of them for whom he came to die. Bless, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin, not simply of Israelites, but also of Gentiles as well. And in the 4th chapter we find this confirmed in that the Lord Jesus says, “Salvation is of the Jews,” and then John later in that same chapter and verse 42 says that, “Jesus is the Savior of the world. So he is the Savior of Jews and Gentiles. He’s the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of Jews and Gentiles. That’s all that’s meant, but it’s a wonderful fact that the Lord Jesus has come to die for Jews and Gentiles, for sinners, and if you have come to understand that you are a sinner, then this salvation is available for you. So, “Behold,” and I say for John to you, “Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away,” effectually taketh away, the sins of Jews and Gentiles.

Now, in the remainder of John’s testimony, he presents the Lord Jesus as the King Messiah. In the Old Testament you see it was said of the Lord Jesus or it was said of the Messiah that he would be anointed with the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah chapter 42 and verse 1, in the passage that has to do with the Suffering Servant of Jehovah in the first of the songs concerning him we read, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom is my delight; I have put my Spirit upon him.” So the anointing of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit was designed to mark him out as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah.

When Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized by him, John rightly saw in him something that was different from everyone else and so he said don't be baptized. “I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?” And the Lord Jesus replied,

“John permit it to be so now for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.” He had no sins to confess but he wanted to demonstrate that he was ready for the coming of the King himself, that his attitude was the kind of attitude that an Israelite ought to have with ref to the coming of the King and so he was baptized in order that he might be made known to Israel, the forerunner baptized him. But the Messianic King or the Suffering Servant of Jehovah had to be a divine King Messiah, and so John says, “He was preferred before me though he came after me for he was before me.” He existed before me.

In fact before Abraham came to be the Lord Jesus said, “I am.” So he’s the pre-existent King Messiah, and when he was baptized and he went down into the water and came up out of the water the Holy Spirit came down upon him like a dove, and it abode upon him. It came to rest upon him. That Greek tense there, the aorist tense is ingressive in force and means the Spirit came to rest upon him. And it rested upon him through his ministry for he carried out his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, anointed by the Holy Spirit. That’s what *mashiyach* or Messiah means, the anointed one. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. That’s what John is talking about when he says, “I saw the Spirit descending like a dove and it came to rest upon him.”

Isn't it interesting he says, “Like a dove?” For Jewish interpreters considered the dove to be symbolic of the Holy Spirit. When they spoke of the Spirit of God abiding over the chaos in the beginning of the creation, they spoke of the Holy Spirit abiding as a dove over the creation. Furthermore the dove was the poor man’s bird of sacrifice. And in additions this was said about the dove, I don't know how true it is, but the dove was the only one of the animals that actually exposed its neck to the knife for the sacrifice. Whether that’s true or not, it is true that our Lord Jesus as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah voluntarily gave himself to the sacrifice of the cross. So John saw the Spirit coming upon him, anointed the Messiah, saw him coming upon him like a dove, and it came to rest upon him. And John says, “I knew him not.”

Isn't that strange? He was his cousin. Undoubtedly they had had some contact, but John did grow up in the desert. It may be like some of our cousins. I have some cousins that I've seen only once or twice in my life. They grew up in Texas. I grew up over there. They grew up in the deserts, [Laughter] Abilene. I wouldn't recognize them. They're my first cousin. I wouldn't recognize them.

So it's possible, but after all Palestine is a small land. I think it's likely that John did know who Jesus was, but what he means when he says, “I knew him not.” Twice he says it. He means I think rather I knew him not as the Messiah, but now he senses his true office and dignity. “I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit.” And when he baptized Jesus though he knew that there was something strange about John baptizing Jesus when the Holy Spirit came and abode upon him in the form of a dove John knew, this is King Messiah. This is the Messiah for whom I have come as the forerunner, the priest victim who is to offer the redemptive sacrifice.

And finally his last word of testimony is, “And I saw and I bore witness, I have testified that this is the Son of God.” This is the climatic testimony because John the Apostle in writing his book writes in order that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that in believing he might have life through his name. So, John the Baptist testifies to him as the Lamb of God who saves both Jews and Gentiles among the people of God. He is also the Messianic King who shall offer the redemptive sacrifice as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. And he is the Son of God.

What is meant by that in this context? Well of course it includes his deity, but what is really meant is directed more toward the knowledge of God. For example, in John 1:18 we have read, “No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has led him forth into full revelation.” So, the term Son of God has to do with the exclusive knowledge of the Father. Later in chapter 6 verse 46

he claims to be the one who has seen the Father. In Matthew chapter 11 he says that he alone knows the Father. And only those know the Father who have the Father revealed to them by him. So he is not only the one who alone knows the Father, but he also is the sovereign dispenser of the knowledge of God. And in this gospel he says the Son is to be given equal honor with the Father. In chapter 5 and verse 23 we read these words that, “All men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honorth not the Son honorth not the Father who hath sent him.” And so what we have then in testimony to the Son of God is the testimony that direct unmediated knowledge of the Father comes to men through Jesus Christ, through the Son of God and that he is to be given equal honor with the Father.

It’s sometimes said by theologians and contemporary preachers that in order for Jesus Christ to give us authentic knowledge of God it’s not necessary for him to be God himself. But if Jesus only came from a distant realm to give us tiding about God then he was wrong about God because in that construction of things God himself takes no initiative toward us, only Christ does. We can never really know that God wishes to come to us and for us if it’s not God who comes to us in Jesus Christ. That’s why we must have a divine Savior, a divine revealer of knowledge about God. And so it’s John’s assertion that God has come in the Lord Jesus and therefore in him we have the exegesis of the Father. We know the Father when we know the Son.

Well John is the first of a long line of witnesses to the Sonship of Jesus Christ, unique Sonship, royal Sonship. Our need is seen in the word sin, and our need is met in John’s great, “Behold,” “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” He is the sin bearer. He’s the sin bearer for Jews and for Gentiles, but is he our sin bearer? That’s the question; can you say he is my sin bearer? Can you really say right where you are now in this auditorium, “Jesus Christ has born away my sin?” Christians say that. Christians can say it. May God give you grace to be able to say it too. If you have any question about your sin and need John’s testimony is still appropriate.

I had a friend who went to Dallas Seminary for a year or two many years ago. We were close friends. He's now a college professor in one of the southern universities. He grew up in a Presbyterian church and so did I, and so we shared a lot of things that we had in common. I remember a story he told me of a friend of his who told him of a conversation he had recently with a lady who was a member of the largest Presbyterian church of Shreveport, Louisiana. And this lady said to the friend, who told it to my friend, she said, “Our pastor is a wonderful man. Do you know that even if he said that I was a sinner, I would believe it?” [Laughter] Well maybe he was a very wonderful man and I hope he said it to her a number of times because evidently she needed it, but it's much better to hear it from apostles and prophets and the forerunner of the Lord Jesus. We are sinners. We need a Savior. The Lord Jesus is that Savior. Come to him.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, We thank Thee and praise Thee for this wonderful testimony of John the Baptist to the Lamb of God, to King Messiah, to the Son of God. We bow before Thee and worship him who has taken away our sin...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]