

The First Testimony Concerning Jesus, Part 2

Scripture: John 1:19-37

Code: 43-6

The gospel of John—we're in chapter 1, working our way through this wonderful presentation of Christ, remembering that John's purpose is very simple. His purpose, which is articulated at the end of the book, is to present the evidences, the testimony, the proof that that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that you might believe and believing have eternal life in His name. His goal, as I said before, first of all polemic, to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God; and then evangelistic, so that you in believing that may have the eternal life that comes with that faith. That's the whole point of the gospel of John. It is evidences of the deity of Jesus Christ, evidences of the messiahship of Christ, evidence that He is the Savior, the only Savior, and that those who believe in Him have forgiveness and eternal life.

So the gospel of John is in the opening eighteen verses a declaration of the deity of Christ. And then starting in verse 19, the evidences proving that declaration to be true. John opens the gospel, as you remember, speaking of the Lord Jesus as the Word and identifying Him as with God and God Himself. He is both God and with God, which is a Trinitarian understanding. He is fully God, and yet He is with God. The members of the Trinity are fully God and yet separate persons. He introduces Him not only as the Word, that is the truth that emanates from deity, but as the life, the very life source of all that lives, and then as light, and that is to say He is God penetrating the darkness of a fallen world.

In verse 14 he sums up his declaration, the Word, the eternal Word who was God, who was with God, became flesh and dwelt among us, and put on display His glory which is the glory of the *prototokos*, the premier one from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And then in verse 15 he said, "John," meaning John the Baptist, "testified about Him." John the Baptist testified about Him. And with the introduction of John the Baptist in verse 15, John the apostle, who is the writer, draws his first witness to the deity of Christ. His first witness to the deity of Christ is none other than John the Baptist, who was introduced in verse 15 by name. He is mentioned earlier because in verse 6 it says, "There came a man sent from God, whose name was John"—there's the first use of his name—"he came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him." So you have, first of all, the introduction of John as the first witness in verse 6. You have again a second reference to John as a witness in verse 15. And then, coming down to verse 19, this is the testimony that John gave, "this is the testimony of John."

Now why is this so important that John the apostle draws from John the Baptist this initial testimony? And the answer to that question is multiple. Number one: because John was a prophet. In fact, he was the only prophet in Israel. In fact, there hadn't been a prophet in 400 years. "And everyone understood John to be a prophet." That is what it says in Matthew 14, and that is what is repeated in Matthew 21:26. Everyone knew him to be a prophet. In John 5:35 it says that for a while everyone was willing to rejoice in his light, and he was a burning and shining lamp.

So, first of all, it is to be understood that if you're going to have a human testimony given to the Messiah, it needs to come from the most credible source. And the most believable, credible preacher and witness to the person of Christ would be the one who was most reliable, who was called by God to be a prophet and therefore spoke the word of God, and that's John the Baptist.

Furthermore, John the Baptist was not just an ordinary man. He didn't have an ordinary origin. He came from a priestly family, which gave him extra credibility because the priests were revered and honored and respected throughout the land of Israel. His lineage was of the highest kind, religiously speaking. And that gave him a hearing. So here is a true prophet, the first one in 400 years, everybody knows that. He speaks for God, he speaks from God, and he is also priestly in his heritage. You can add this other component to John's credibility—his birth was extraordinary. One might say miraculous because his parents were barren, and they were in their senior years—had never been able to have children—and his mother Elizabeth gives birth in her old age to this son. That is miraculous.

Beyond that, his birth was not only a miraculous event, but it was a prophesied event by an angel who showed up to Zacharias when he was doing his sacrificial work in Jerusalem. An angel from heaven came and declared to him that they would have a child and that this child would be the forerunner of the Messiah, that he would actually come into their lives through the normal birth channels—even though they were barren—that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, that he would come in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn many of the hearts of the people back to God and prepare them for the arrival of Messiah.

So he was a prophet and recognized to be a prophet. He had a miraculous birth, humanly speaking. He was prophesied by an angel, and the prophecy of the angel came to pass. Another component that makes John so unique is he lived completely apart from the religious system of Israel. He, from the time that he disappears in chapter 1 of Luke, he goes into the wilderness and for thirty years or the greater portion of that thirty years, he lives like a hermit out in the middle of the desert and eats whatever he can find with his hand and wears whatever he can put on his back (camel's hair). He is a nomad who is completely alien to the religious system. In fact, he's so alien to the religious system that the first glimpse we have of the leaders of Israel coming to him, he says to them, "You brood of snakes, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He is not only alien to the apostate system of Judaism, he is anti-apostate Judaism. He's not only separate from them, he speaks prophetically against them and warns of their judgment to come.

This is the man that John draws on for the initial testimony. He's not a product of the system religiously. He's not, in a sense, simply a product of a human life. He is a divinely prepared child. He is not a man who found a career because he sort of had a bent that way. He was ordained by God and so prophesied to do what he did. And he was before all a true prophet, a burning, shining lamp.

The point being this, that if you're going to identify someone to start the testimony, pick the most credible person. And that's exactly what John the apostle does in drawing out John the Baptist. As I told you last time, John isn't concerned about where he lives, what he wears, what he eats. He's only concerned about his testimony. The nation acknowledges John the Baptist as a spokesman for God and so John draws on his testimony and rightly so. This is the most credible, believable, trustworthy voice in Israel. And the people have come to know it and they're flooding his wilderness location, coming by the tens of thousands from all Jerusalem, Judea, and the surrounding places to hear him.

Now to get this testimony, in verses 19 to 37 John the apostle hones in on three days, three days of the enduring ministry of John the Baptist. He ministered for months and months but out of that period there's a three-day sort of apex, and it's an important three days because on day two Jesus actually shows up. And so John the apostle gives us a picture and gives us within that picture of the ministry of John the Baptist, the specific testimony of John. There are three points here and John has three messages to give. He gives one on day one, another on day two, and another on day three; and they're sequential, and they are testimonies that really are permanent in their validity.

On day one he says, "He is here." On day two he says, "Look at Him." And on day three he says, "Follow Him." And that would be the message that any preacher would give regarding Christ. He is here, look at Him, see the revelation of who He is and follow Him. And that's the nature of John's ministry. So that gives you the overview—three days, three messages.

And interestingly enough, the three messages are given to three groups. On day one it is a hostile delegation from the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leading religious council. On day two it is the mass of people that are there. And on day three it is some of John's own disciples. So three days, three messages to three different groups.

Now let's look at day one and we've already started into this last time; we'll pick it up. Day one, given to the Jewish delegation that had come from Jerusalem, to confront John and ask him the questions that the religious leaders wanted answered. Verse 19, "This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem."

Jerusalem is the obvious headquarters of Jewish religion. The people in power in the Jewish council, which is called the Sanhedrin, that's a council of seventy plus the high priest who ran Judaism. That council is made up predominantly of Sadducees. Sadducees were religious liberals who were not fundamentalists in the sense that the Pharisees were—didn't believe in miracles, didn't believe in physical resurrection. They were the sort of critics of the Old Testament, didn't necessarily believe in the minutia of the Word of God the way the Pharisees did. But they had the bulk of power. And the predominance of the Sanhedrin members came from the Sadducees, the high priest, former high priest, the chief priest which made up mostly of Sadducees. They controlled the temple operation and the money and the power and the connections with Rome.

But with them were the Pharisees. They were much more devoted to the law. They were less political. They were the ones who studied the law, who applied the law, who taught the law to the people. And they were the lawyers, we would say, that is they were the experts on the law of God.

But apparently this delegation from the Sanhedrin is mixed with both. The idea in verse 19 that the Jews sent them would mean that they came from the Sanhedrin. John uses the expression "the Jews" seventy times in his gospel. As I told you last time, he's not using it ethnically, or racially, he's using it to identify those hostile to Jesus. Those who are hostile to Jesus, he calls "the Jews." And that would represent the Sanhedrin. But it also encompasses, verse 24 says, the Pharisees. They had been sent from the Pharisees. The best we can say is this is probably a coalition coming from the Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees become the leading questioners in this group. As I said, the Sadducees predominated in the Sanhedrin, but it also included Pharisees.

So here comes this delegation and they select priests; the Sanhedrin selects priests and Levites

from Jerusalem. And they are accompanied by Pharisees. They come to pose questions to John the Baptist. The questions sound like questions that reflect the Pharisaic understanding because they're connected to the interpretation of the Old Testament, which was their primary realm of operation.

So they come to John and they ask him a series of questions about who he is. Verse 19, "Who are you?" What is implied in that question is, "Are you the Messiah?" How do you know that's implied? Because of his answer in verse 20, "He confessed and didn't deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.'" So we understood that what they were asking is, "Are you the Messiah?" And he says, "No, I am not the Messiah." And the Greek language is very strong, a very, very strong denial. Later in chapter 3 we have another incident with John the Baptist when he says exactly the same thing, chapter 3, "I am not the Messiah. I am not the Christ."

So they then say to him, "Well, what then?"—verse 21—"Are you Elijah?" Why did they ask that? Because Malachi 4:5—our Old Testament ends with that—promises that before the coming of Messiah in judgment at the great and terrible day of the Lord, Elijah will come, Elijah will come. And his answer is the same. "I am not," a very strong denial, "I am not the...I am not Elijah." This is not a recycled prophet. This is not a reincarnation. This is not Elijah taking on another name. This is a man who has never previously lived, born to Zacharias and Elizabeth, named John, and called the Baptist because of his baptizing ministry. "I am not Elijah."

Now that poses an important question, because in Matthew 17 the statement is made by our Lord that John is Elijah, John is Elijah. And people say, "Well, wait a minute, John says he's not, and Jesus says he is. How do we harmonize those two?"

It's very simple. You understand it this way. In Luke 1:17 the angel said to Zacharias he will come "in the spirit and power of Elijah," He will come "in the spirit and power of Elijah"—with the same boldness and the same power in preaching, and the same call to repentance that Elijah had.

So there will be two, in a sense, comings of Elijah. At the first coming of Christ there will be one in the spirit and power of Elijah. At the Second Coming of Christ there will be the actual Elijah. Prior to the coming of Christ in judgment will come Elijah, but prior to the coming of Christ to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin there is John who comes in the spirit and power of Elijah. That's made clear, I think, if you read Matthew 16:13 to 16 and compare that with the seventh chapter, verses 9 to 13 of Matthew as well. So John says I'm not the return of Elijah prior to the coming of Christ. And remember, Elijah didn't die; he went to heaven, taken to heaven by God in the chariot. And so he didn't die. He will return in the future, before the Second Coming of Christ.

So they ask him another question. "Are you the Prophet?" "Are you the Prophet?" What is that? Deuteronomy 18, Moses talked about a prophet who would come, a prophet who would come and speak the word of the Lord. And the Jews knew he was talking about Messiah; they assumed he was talking about Messiah. And if you read the sermon of Peter in Acts 3:22 and 23, he says that that passage in Deuteronomy 18 is referring to Messiah. If you read the sermon of Stephen in chapter 7, verse 37, he says Deuteronomy 18 is referring to Messiah. So that was common Jewish understanding. So they're asking questions about these eschatological figures. Are you the Messiah? Are you the one who is to come before the Messiah? And then they ask him again, Are you the Prophet who they believe to be the Messiah? Who are you?

And the question that's behind the questions is this: "Why in the world do you think you have the authority to be baptizing these masses of people?" Again, their issues were always about power and authority. They were completely hostile to Jesus because He assumed authority in what He said and what He did. He hadn't come through any rabbinical system, any rabbinical institution, any rabbinical training—none of the normal channels. He didn't have any authorization from anybody in religious power, and Jesus acted on His own authority again and again and again, and He said, "Look, I have all authority given to Me," as you know, "in heaven and in earth." He took authority over the Sabbath. He took authority over death. He took authority over demons. He took authority over creation, nature. He took authority over diseases. And this issue of authority especially irritated them when He took authority to interpret the Word of God and declare for God what God would say. It was always about authority because Jesus was a massive threat to their religious authority.

Well, John was the same. The people were going to John by the tens of thousands. Typically speaking, if we can go back and look at their history a little bit, they did have a baptism that they enacted for proselytes, meaning Gentiles who wanted to become Jews and become a part of their religion. They could go through a proselyte baptism, go into water symbolizing externally what was going on internally. In other words, I want to be cleansed of my paganism and I want to enter into the religion of the true God of Israel.

From what I can tell in reading, this was actually done by individuals. In other words, they would do it themselves. I suppose a friend could do it but from what I can tell, if you wanted to become a Jew, you would literally do a baptism of yourself, put yourself in water as a symbol on the outside of what you wanted to happen on the inside. At least we cannot find any authorized group in the history of Israel that did this. So it seems to be something people did as a sort of public confession. And so, here comes John and he takes the authority to be the one doing this, and he actually goes so far as to say, "I am doing this by divine authority." Down in verse 33, "He who sent me to baptize in water." So he comes with this commission and must have made it known that he was doing this with authority from God. So they're saying to him, "Who do you think you are? You're not the Messiah. We might allow for the Messiah to do this. You're not Elijah. We might assume that Elijah would do this. Where do you get the power or the authority to do this?" That's what's behind the question.

Verse 22, "They said to him, 'Who are you then, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us?'" We have to give a report back to the Sanhedrin. What do you say about yourself? And after saying, "I am not, I am not, I am not," he finally says, "I am." Verse 23, "I'm a voice." And we went over that last time. "I'm a voice; that's all I am." He's very humble; verse 15, you know, he said about Christ, "He comes after me but He is a higher rank than I, for He existed before me." Verse 27, the same attitude, "He comes after me, and the thong of His sandal I'm not worthy to untie." In verse 30 again he says, "He comes after me, but He has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me." Amazing statements that show the humility of John. He's humble; he's selfless; he wants no titles, no honors, no money, no comforts, no followers, no disciples. He wants to point to Christ, and that's exactly what he does. He just continues to point to Christ.

So he says, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness," and he draws it right out of Isaiah 40, verse 3; that's a quote from Isaiah 40, verse 3. I am the fulfillment of that prophecy. The prophecy that there would come before the Messiah a voice crying in the wilderness, not particularly the wilderness of Judea, but the wilderness of Israel in the spiritual sense—the barrenness, the bankruptcy, the desert of hearts that Israel had become with no life. I'm coming into that wilderness. I am a voice, nothing more. And I say make straight the way of the Lord as Isaiah the prophet says in

Isaiah 40, verses 3 through 5.

So he says my job is to be a voice to cry out to you to make your heart a ready path for the King. The King is on the way; I'm telling you to get ready. He is a true preacher, John is, he's a true teacher. He's a true believer. But he's only a voice, and he's pointing to Jesus Christ. And he's telling the people, "Make your path straight." Get the obstacles, the bends, the dips, the high places, and I went into that a little bit from Isaiah 40 last time. The low places, the base places in your life need to be lifted up. The high places, the proud places need to be brought down—the crooked part of your life, the perverted places need to be straightened out. The cluttered places need to be cleaned off to get ready for the one who is coming. I'm only the voice. I'm only the voice.

But what an unspeakable honor for John. How amazing it must have been to realize that every day that you are those beautiful feet mentioned by Isaiah and also by Paul in Romans 10. How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel. How amazing to know that you are the herald of heaven's King, of heaven's Lamb, of the Messiah. And he knows that, and he understands that. And he deflects the question when asked him, "Who do you say you are? How do we explain you?" He says, "I'm a voice, that's all. I'm a voice. I'm a voice."

So verse 25, they get to what motivated the whole thing, they asked him and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing?" Why are you doing this? You're not the Christ. You're not Elijah. You're not the prophet of Deuteronomy 18. Where do you come off doing this? Where did you get this right? Where did you get this authority? They would have expected the Messiah to do it, perhaps. They would have expected Elijah to do it. But what about John, how can he put himself in this position? And John's response, essentially, is to say, "You're making too much out of this." "You're making too much out of this." Verse 26, "John answered them saying, 'I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I'm not worthy to untie.'" In other words, why are you focused on me? Why are you so caught up with me? I baptize in water. He just deflects this thing completely away. I baptize in water. What's the big deal? This is water. This is just putting people in water—just an external symbol.

He did have authority, verse 33. "He who sent me to baptize said to me"—and that would be God—"He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit"—namely the Son. And that's the recollection of his being at the baptism of our Lord. He did have divine authority. He did what he did because God told him to do it. But he doesn't tell them that at that moment. He says, "Look, you're making too much of this. I'm just doing water baptism here. There's one that you need to look at who is already among you, and He will baptize with the Holy Spirit. You need to be far more concerned about the one who deals with hearts than you are about me and what I do." Real baptism, real purification, regeneration, the washing of regeneration, is going to be the work of the Messiah. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit. That's at the end of verse 33.

So John does what he always did, turns everybody's attention toward Christ. And there you have his first message in verse 26, "Among you stands One whom you do not know; He is here." That's his first message. He's here. Why are you caught up with me? You see me, you know me, but One stands already here that you don't know. He's the One you need to know. He's the One you need to know. He's the One, he later says, who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. In other words, He's the One who deals with the heart, with the heart. The Messiah is present. He's here. He doesn't mean He's standing there by the water that day. He means He's in the land; He has arrived. At the very moment

he says this, Jesus is walking toward where John is and will arrive the next day. It was forty-plus days ago that John baptized Jesus. And then Jesus went, carried by the Holy Spirit, up into the wilderness for forty days of temptation. The forty days of temptation is ended. Jesus is on His way back, back to John. And what John is saying is not that He's here on the spot, but that He's here—He has been identified and He's present. That's the first great message that John gives. That's where all gospel preaching starts, doesn't it? He's here; He's come; He's come; He's come.

In their eagerness to expose all the false Messiahs, elevate themselves, they didn't know the true Messiah. John says, "I'm not even worthy to untie the thong of His sandals." That would be the lowest level of a slave who would take care of people's dirty feet. "I'm not even worthy to do that. I'm nothing. I'm the lowest of the lowest unprofitable servant. You don't need to be looking at me. You don't need to be concerned about me. I'm a voice. I'm a slave. You need to be looking at Him. You can see me and know me, but you don't know Him, and that's the issue. Get past the preacher," he's saying. Get past the preacher to the One of whom the preacher speaks.

So on the first day you have John's first testimony to that group from the Sanhedrin and he says, "He's here." "He is here." By the way, that message would have gone immediately back to Jerusalem and would have made the Jews in the Sanhedrin, and the wide influence of that information would have spread to all the elite leaders in Israel—the Messiah is here. And what that does is leave the Jews without any excuse such as, "Oh, we're surprised that Jesus has shown up and claimed to be the Messiah." They are on notice before Jesus begins His ministry officially that the Messiah has arrived. And from that very outset of that report going back, their hostility goes all the way to the cross where they finally execute Him. The message is the same: He's here; He's come.

Let's look at day two. Day two picks up the story in verse 29. All of this, of course, verse 28 says, was happening in a place called Bethany beyond the Jordan. Not the Bethany on the eastside of Jerusalem there, but another Bethany. We don't know where exactly it was; out beyond the Jordan River into the wilderness. It all happened there. But verse 29 then takes us to day two, the next day. He saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" This is day two; this is group two. Group two, all the people that are gathered, all the crowd, and the message: "Look at Him." "Look at Him." "Look at Him."

Message one: He's here. Message two: Look at Him, He is the Lamb of God. He is the Lamb of God. Day one was kind of a private delegation. Day two is the public proclamation. And it's a shock because he sees Jesus coming to him and he knows Him, obviously. And he declares Him to be the Lamb of God, and that's an exclamation, "Behold!" Look at Him. Take Him in. Take in the reality of who He is. He is here and this is who He is. He is the Lamb of God. That's not what they expected to hear. Why would the Messiah be a Lamb? Why would...at best, a lamb is impotent, weak, helpless, stupid, dependent, even dirty.

What do you mean the Messiah's a Lamb? This is shocking, shocking. They would have expected him to say, "Behold your King. Behold the triumphant One. Behold the majestic One. Behold the exalted One. Behold the Ruler. Behold the Anointed One." But he says, "Behold the lamb of God." At best, as I said, a lamb is impotent and weak. At worst, a lamb is dead. And lambs were sacrificed all the time. All through the centuries Israel knew about a sacrificial lamb—going all the way back to Abraham and Isaac and God providing a sacrifice for Abraham so he didn't have to kill his own son. And then back to the Exodus and the Passover Lamb and every Passover after that, and every morning and every evening, there was a morning sacrifice, an evening sacrifice, and lambs were

slain as sin offerings over and over and over and over, day after day after day, century after century after century. And they also knew, Isaiah 53, that He was led as a lamb to slaughter. The One who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, and the One upon whom the chastening for our peace fell. They knew all of that. They knew about sacrifice. But they didn't know how it fit because they never saw themselves as a people needing a sacrifice.

In other words, they assumed that the combination of their righteousness and their obedience in offering an animal was enough. But those animals couldn't take away sin; they could only point to the one sacrifice that would take away sin, that had not yet come until Christ. And because they didn't recognize their sinfulness, they didn't recognize they were under judgment, under wrath, needed a sacrifice, and that their Messiah was to be that sacrifice that Isaiah 53 was talking about—their Messiah—they had no concept they needed or that the Messiah would be a lamb. And so John says, "Behold the Lamb of God"—the lamb that God has chosen to be the sacrifice.

Every family chose its lamb. Every father chose a lamb. This is the lamb that God has chosen. He's come to deal with sin at last, to be wounded for our transgressions. He became sin for us who knew no sin. He offered Himself as a sacrifice on the cross. He bore our sins in His own body. God made Him who knew no sin, sin for us. All those New Testament explanations. The Jews wanted a prophet. The Jews wanted a king. They got a lamb. They wanted a leader; they wanted a monarch. They got a substitute. They wanted an exalted messiah. They received rather a humiliated sacrifice. They wanted one who could kill all their enemies, and they got One whom their enemies killed. But then again, they could never have a king until they had a lamb. And that's the two comings. There could never be a coming in glory to reign until there's a coming in humiliation to die.

"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" What that means is that for the whole world there is only one who can take away sin. For the whole world, there's only one who can take away sin, and that's this One who will die as the sacrificial lamb God accepts. And John then adds what he said back in verses 15 and 27, "This is He on behalf of whom I said, after me comes a man who's higher rank than I, for He existed before me." And again he says, "Get your attention off me. He came after me in terms of beginning His ministry, but He existed before me. He was born after I was born, and yet He existed before me. Get your eyes on this eternal One. Get your eyes on this exalted One who is of higher rank than I am, the One you don't know."

And then John is again deflecting, and yet at the same time understanding, the difficulty of this because he says in verse 31, "I didn't recognize Him at first." You say, "Well weren't Elizabeth and Mary related?" They were. Elizabeth and Mary were related. "Didn't Elizabeth and Mary talk?" Sure. Mary knew that she had conceived Jesus as the Son of God without a father, humanly speaking. Elizabeth knew of the miracle of her birth. They were together when both of them were pregnant. They knew; didn't they talk about that through the years? Wouldn't have those women told their sons that they were who they were? And wouldn't John know that Jesus was the Son of God?

Well, the answer is, "Yeah, he would know that because his mother would have told him, and Mary may have told him. And it certainly was known in the family." But you have Jesus, thirty years of complete obscurity, thirty years in a carpenter shop, which would raise some pretty serious questions, wouldn't it? I mean, John's trying to say, "He's the Son of God; He's God in human flesh; He's the Messiah." Nothing's happening. Nothing's happening. It would be easy for doubt to come in.

You know, even later in the ministry of John, after it became clear who Jesus was, John began to

doubt. You remember that? John began to doubt whether Jesus was actually the Messiah, because even after He started His ministry, He didn't do anything; He didn't conquer anything; He didn't take over anything. So John sent some of his disciples to Jesus and they said, "John wants to know if You're really the Messiah? Are You really the Messiah?" And Jesus said, "Tell them about the things I've done. Tell them about the works."

So John had questions. They aren't questions because nobody had given him information. He had information from his family knowledge. He had information from the ministry of Christ. But because Jesus wasn't acting the way he thought a Messiah should act, either obscure in the first part, or increasingly hated in His public ministry, questions arose.

So here John is just admitting that I didn't recognize Him in the full sense; *oida* is the Greek verb. I didn't recognize Him in the full, deep sense. But so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water. And John testified then in verse 32 saying, "I've seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained on Him. I didn't recognize Him." Up to that point he's saying, "I knew Him, but there was no way for me to be certain that this is the Messiah, which by the way, is a footnote, is a clear declaration that Jesus' humanity was real humanity. There was nothing about seeing the man Jesus that would tell you He was a heavenly person. I didn't recognize Him. "But He who sent me to baptize in water," that's God, "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.'"

You remember at His baptism, Matthew 3, Luke 3, the Spirit came down, the Father said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." John at that moment knows. But as I said, even later after that, doubts arise because he doesn't see the evidences that he would have anticipated. But at this point John gives us this testimony, verse 31, "I didn't recognize Him, then I was called to baptize." Verse 33, "I didn't recognize Him until the Father told me He's the one the Spirit descends on." At that point, verse 34, "I myself have seen, and testified this is the Son of God."

So on day two we could say this: John says to the crowd, "Look at Him, the Lamb of God who is the Son of God." That's John's ministry. The Lamb of God who is the Son of God. He knows it. He's heard the voice from heaven of the Father. He's seen the Spirit coming down and again, as I said, later on he had some doubts, but they were affirmed with the testimony coming back from his disciples when they asked. "Now I know John's testimony, this is the Son of God." So you have the finest, the most believable, credible, trustworthy voice in Israel affirming that this is the Lamb of God who is the Son of God.

Verse 35 takes us to day three, just briefly. "Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, 'Again, behold the Lamb of God.'" I think he's in awe. I think he's just struck with the One in whose presence he walks. The two disciples heard him say that, and they followed Jesus. All right, this is day three, group three. Who are they? Two disciples of John. John was a teacher and John had followers. So here are a couple of them. By the way, we know who these two are. According to verse 40, one of them is Andrew; one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus was Andrew. Who's the other one? Well, the writer of the gospel of John is always reluctant to name one of them. Who is it? Himself.

So Andrew and John started out as followers of John the Baptist, getting ready for Messiah. And John, who wanted no disciples, the next day is standing with them and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and he says to these two disciples, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" Look, what are you doing

hanging around me?

“The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.” And verse 38, I love this, “Jesus turned and saw them following Him, and said to them, ‘What do you seek?’” What do you guys want?

They said, “Rabbi, where are You staying?” In other words, this isn’t a short-term interest. Wherever you’re going and wherever you’re going to stay, that’s where we’re going to stay. John had done his job, hadn’t he? He’s here. He’s the Lamb of God and the Son of God. Follow Him and stay with Him. That is a pure and blessed gospel ministry, modeled for us by this selfless, humble, meek man who, by the way if you didn’t know, is one of my favorites in all of Scripture—John the Baptist. Yes, He’s here. Look at Him. He’s the Lamb of God and the Son of God. Follow Him permanently. That’s the essence, by the way, of saving faith.

You understand that He came. You understand who He is. And you commit your life to follow. That’s what it means to be a Christian. Bow with me in prayer.

Father, we acknowledge there is a beautiful simplicity in Scripture and an evident consistency in Scripture, that there is one message preached numerous ways, and that one message is about Christ Jesus, the One who is the Son of God, the only Savior. And it is to know that He came to believe the truth about Him and to follow Him. Father, we thank You for the testimony of John. We thank You that that testimony continues to go on from John, even as it did this morning through an understanding of this chapter, and that it’s extended through the rest of the New Testament and through all of history through faithful preachers who proclaim the coming of Christ to be the Lamb and who call people to put their trust and faith in Him and follow Him permanently. I pray that the Holy Spirit today, O God, would touch the hearts of some who are here who may be in danger, as those in Hebrews 6 were in danger, of knowing the truth, understanding the truth, even believing the truth, to a degree, but never committing themselves to Christ—be in danger of falling away, never to be renewed to repentance. I pray, Lord, that Your Holy Spirit will draw them away to Christ. We have no desire as preachers that people be our disciples or be attached to us, but that they follow Christ. We speak of Him, His coming, His life, His identity, and as John, we call sinners to follow Him and to go where He goes and stay where He stays. I pray, Lord, that You would grant that marvelous gift of salvation to some even today, even here.

And now, Lord, work in our hearts, all of us, to bring about, first of all, a new understanding of the glory of Christ and the sweet truth of the gospel; and make us ever thankful for the knowledge that has saved us, granted by Your Spirit and by Your will and Your power. Pray for those that don’t know Christ—may this be the day of their salvation. I pray that You’ll encourage us with the truth, fill our hearts with joy, and make us faithful witnesses that others may know our Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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