

Passage: John 1:19-34

Sermon: Behold, the Lamb of God

Introduction:

Titles are very important. It tells us a lot about someone. If you get the title wrong, you might offend someone. In some Asian cultures we address our elders in a very particular manner. We use particular words for particular people because we recognise their status and title. The equivalent would be addressing individuals as Mr, Mrs, Doctor, Sir, Professor etc. Different titles are given as well in particular contexts. We have CEOs, CFOs, MVP and so on. And these titles help give us clarity in the role of the particular person and what relationship they with us. Jesus has multiple titles given to him. And unlike the titles we might have for others, his titles mean a world of difference.

We are looking at the testimony of John the Baptist this evening and what he tells us about the person and work of Jesus Christ. In verse 31, John the Baptist gives the purpose of his ministry, "but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel". His ministry and message points us forward to Jesus. He reveals not only to the people of Israel in his day but to us, the significance of Jesus in history. I want to look at 3 titles John the Baptist draws our attention to:

- 1. Jesus the *Anointed one of God* (v19-28)**
- 2. Jesus the *Lamb of God* (v29-31)**
- 3. Jesus the *Son of God* (v32-34)**

Jesus the Anointed one of God: (v19-28)

In verse 19-28 we are given the testimony of John the Baptist to the priests and Levites sent by the Jews from Jerusalem. *"And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"* (v19) The Jews from Jerusalem is probably a reference to the Sanhedrin which is the supreme/ruling council, made up of 70 men and the High Priest. They are the ones who ultimately took part in a series of trials that resulted to Jesus' crucifixion. They've come to question John. The question they ask is, "Who are you?". John's ministry has piqued the interest of the Jews. Mark 1:4 says, *"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"*. In Matthew 3:2 his message was, *"repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"*. This man in the wilderness preached a message which had been received by many people and the Jews want to know who he is. Ultimately, they are wondering whether or not he is the Christ, the messiah, the anointed one, whom they have been waiting for. We know that because of how John responds to the question. Verse 20 he emphatically rejects any notion that he is the Christ.

"He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ". The title Christ is the Old Testament's title for "Messiah" and it translates to the "Anointed one". The bible identifies many individuals as anointed ones, since every prophet, priest and king in scriptures had been set apart for the office that had been given to them. But we know over the course of biblical history that the people of God were looking forward to the final Anointed one. They were looking forward to the one whom God would send. Isaiah 61 gives

us a neat presentation of the servant of the Lord who is the Anointed one of God. (Isaiah 61:1-4)

*“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion...”*

And so on... This servant whom the people of God were waiting for was the ideal king, the ideal prophet of God, the ideal priest who would represent and intercede for them. He was the one who was seen to preach good news to the poor, release those in bondage and captivity, proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and usher in God's judgment upon His enemies.

John's ministry seemed to represent that anointed one. However, he was definitely not the Anointed one that they were looking forward to. His role was to prepare the way for his coming. He was the forerunner for the king. His response to the various other questions of identification from the priest and Levites in verse 23 is, *“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘make straight the way of the lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”* The reason why they asked whether he was Elijah is because in Malachi 4:5, God promised saying, *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”* And the reason why they asked whether he was the Prophet is because God promised to send a new Prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15-18, *““The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen” (v15)*

But John knew that he was just a messenger. He knew that he was the one who paved a way and prepared people for the ministry of Jesus. The quotation he is referring to comes from Isaiah 40:3-5.

The interesting thing with the text in Isaiah is that the “LORD” is capitalised. It is YAHWEH. It is God's covenant name. It is God the creator and ruler of the world. John equates the Anointed of God as being YAHWEH himself. And that makes sense since Jesus is God in the flesh! The final anointed one of God, the perfect prophet, priest and king, is God himself in the second person of the trinity. Wow. God himself would be the one to set captives free. And John is overwhelmed by that fact. He knows how amazing that truth is. He says in verse 26-27 that Jesus is infinitely more worthy and superior than himself. His response to why he is baptizing is that Jesus is more worthy and superior. His baptism of water is nothing compared to the Anointed one. Verse 26-27, *“⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”* The infinitely worthy and superior Anointed one is unrecognized amongst the people. But he is one who is worthy of worship. John's understanding of the authority and awesomeness of Jesus leads him to have extraordinary humility. He isn't even worthy to untie the strap of his sandals.

If you were a woman and you wanted to meet the Pope you have to wear a black dress with long sleeves and a black veil. Even someone like Melanie Trump when she met him in 2017 or Michelle Obama 2009 or Hillary Clinton in 1994. Only a few women had what they call the “privilege of the white”, which meant they could wear white to such an occasion. The tradition states that only around 7 people were worthy of wearing white before the Pope. “the queens of Italy, Belgium and Spain, grand duchesses of Luxembourg, and princesses of the House of Savoy”. What they get right is the fact that there is a distinct difference between the worthiness and superiority of someone of “great importance” and everyone else. People submit to the customs and rules of the Pope. Unlike the Pope who is not infinitely more worthy and not infinitely more superior, Jesus is someone who is so worthy, so much more superior, that even John the Baptist would claim to not be worthy of untying the strap of his sandals. John the Baptist would submit to Jesus.

Do you exercise as much humility as John the Baptist? John saw his ministry as a privilege and a blessing. He was full of humility. Sadly, there are many in ministry who exercise their authority with great arrogance. Instead of being a servant to their King, a servant to the people, they bring shame to the gospel message by building their own kingdom. Have humility before the Anointed one of God--Jesus the Christ.

What’s interesting is, although in verse 19-28, the testimony of John the Baptist points forward to the coming Anointed of God, his declaration of Jesus zones in to a very particular aspect of his personhood and work.

Jesus the Lamb of God: (v29-31)

v29, “²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”. You would think he would say, “Behold the Christ” or “Behold the King”. But instead he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God”. The Anointed one would not usher his kingdom in the way the Jews wanted him to. They wanted a military king. A king who would free them from the Roman Empire. A king who would bring the glory of the Davidic kingdom back. But by declaring the Anointed one as the Lamb of God, John shows us what type of ministry Jesus would be doing. Jesus is the Lamb of God, who through the shedding of his blood, ransoms a people for himself. Jesus, the Lamb of God who will take our place and be a substitute for us.

Behold, Jesus the lamb of God who brings forgiveness of sins. The reason we know that is the case is because of how the lamb is seen in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is full of different stories and situations where a lamb is slain.

Look at Genesis 22, God tests Abraham and tells him to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering. He lays Isaac and is about to slaughter his son as a sacrifice to God. By faith Abraham knew that God could and would provide a lamb and he knew that God could raise Isaac up (Hebrews 11:19). The lamb plays a substitutionary role.

Or if you look at Leviticus 4:32-35. Lambs were offered as a sin sacrifice. They were to be spotless and without blemish. V32-35, *“If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish³³ and lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering.v35 ” And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.”* We know that Jesus would be perfect, without sin yet would take the punishment for sins.

Or perhaps if you look at the story of the Exodus. God freed his people out of slavery. In order to do that and to save them from death, they were to take a Passover lamb. By the death and shedding of the Passover lamb, the one without blemish (Exodus 12:5), God would Pass death over them. And from then on, every Passover, every morning and evening sacrifice, lambs were slain day after day. That is a lot of lambs. A lot of lambs that needs to be slain. A lot of blood. 100 of 1000s of lambs slain as a symbol and response to God’s salvation. Jesus the Lamb of God slain to free people from the bondage of sin and death.

Famously in Isaiah 53:7 we have the picture of Jesus as the lamb. *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”*

So, Jesus’s ministry as the Anointed one of God, is primarily to be the Lamb of God in which he took the place of sinners on the cross through the shedding of his blood. Very different to what the Jews wanted. And John makes it clear that that’s what he came to do. *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*.

You need to take John’s testimony and declaration of Jesus seriously. Because what he has done in his ministry before this time and by declaring Jesus as the Lamb of God, is that he has made it plain to the world that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. He makes it plain that everyone is sinful and that no one stands right before God. What he makes plain is that, the sacrificial offerings of the Old Testament cannot make one righteous. In fact, even the moral righteousness of the pharisees cannot make you right before God. Hebrews 10:4 makes it plain, *“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”*. What you and I, and the rest of the world need, is the Lamb of God. The blood of Jesus. Hebrews 9:26, *“But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”* Jesus makes a substitutionary atonement for our sin. He is the scapegoat. He bears the sins, the guilt and shame of those who trust in him. And that places Jesus at the centre and foundation of salvation.

Isn’t that a beautiful and praiseworthy truth. Jesus Christ has taken upon himself the punishment for sin. He has put away all your guilt and shame. He offers new life and future for those who repent and believe in him. Romans 8:1-4 puts it beautifully, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what*

the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Guilt and shame are universal. Pain and suffering are universal. Every single person in this world has done something that they regret. Every single person in this world wishes for a better future because the struggles and agonies of this world is a reality. Because of sin, life is not perfect. But in Jesus, there is hope. Jesus truly becomes the scapegoat. All the past sins, all the past hurts, all the past pains can be put aside. Done away with. Because in Jesus there is now a better future. Infinitely better future. Unrighteousness of ourselves now turned to the Righteousness of Jesus the Anointed one, Jesus the Lamb of God. The pain and sufferings of the past, now a light momentary affliction in light of the infinite glorious, joyful, pain free, perfect future in the new heavens and new earth.

Why can Jesus do this? Verse 30, *“This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’”*. We talked about this 2 weeks ago. It is a repetition of verse 15. Because he is the Word. The eternal Word. There is no greater sacrifice than the Lamb that was slain.

Before we move to our final point, I want to draw your attention to the fact that this particular Greek word used here for Lamb is only used 4 times. Twice here. Once in 1 Peter 1:19 which uses it to refer to Jesus as the lamb spotless and without blemish. And once in Acts 8:32 in the account of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. In Acts, it is the quote from Isaiah 53. The Ethiopian Eunuch asks Peter who is this lamb that is being spoken of. And Philip explains the good news about Jesus. In 8:36-38 after hearing this great news, he immediately wants to get baptised. He doesn't hesitate. And after responding in repentance, belief and baptism, verse 39 says, *“And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.”* He went on his way rejoicing.

He applies the truth of Jesus as the Lamb of God rightly. The only appropriate response to the Lamb of God is to repent and believe. Immediately. And then to go out rejoicing because of what it means to be saved by the blood of the Lamb. Church, rejoice. Rejoice always because the blood of lamb has washed you clean! Jesus the Lamb of God.

And finally,

Jesus the Son of God: (v32-34)

We've looked at Jesus the Son of God in our first few sermons of the gospel of John, so I don't want to spend a great depth in saying similar things. But notice what happens here in verse 32-34. John says something about the Son of God which we haven't touched on.

³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

The Son of God is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. God had ordained John to baptise with water. John's baptism of water prepared people for the coming of Jesus. And what is of interest here is the fact that God makes it clear to John the Baptist, that the one whom he sees the Spirit descend and remain on, is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. And in verse 32, John tells us what he saw. He saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove upon Jesus. It was Jesus whom the Spirit remained on. Ezekiel 35:25-27 talks about the time where God would give new hearts and a new spirit, "26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules". Jesus baptizing with the Spirit is proof that the promised time has come. In John 3:34 it says this about Jesus, "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.". Jesus is full of Spirit. He has the spirit without limit. And he can give it out abundantly.

What that means then, is that Jesus is the one through whom we are initiated into God's kingdom and family through receiving the life of God the Holy Spirit. It is through Jesus the Son of God that we are born again. And it is Jesus who after his death, resurrection and ascension, would send the third of person of trinity into the hearts of those who believed. John 7:39, "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.". In Acts 1:5, "for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.".

Jesus the son has not left believers alone. He baptizes with Spirit. That means, that if you know Jesus, if you are a child of God, God has changed your heart. He is enabled you to see spiritual truth. He is enabled you to see his glory. He is empowering you today by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is working his purposes through you. And you can be sure that he will never leave you or forsake you. The Son of God, Jesus, baptizes with the Spirit and so you can have full confidence in whatever situation you are in because the Spirit now lives in you.

Conclusion:

There is this lady who I see every Tuesday at Flemington Mission. She keeps calling me Father Andrew. She associates me with the Roman Catholic Church. That's a little problematic and so I try to correct her every time and she says with a smile, "okay Father". I am not sure if she is joking around with me. Unlike a misunderstood title for myself, knowing who Jesus is makes a world of difference. He is the Anointed one of God, the perfect prophet, priest and king. He is the one sent by God and you need to take him seriously. He is the Lamb of God. The lamb that was slain for the sins of his people. There is great joy and freedom in him. He is the Son of God who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. He changes hearts and equips you and I for the present and future. Amen.