

“Behold the Lamb”

- Jesus was introduced in the first text of our series
- We had the benefit of learning who He is and why He came
- This is the most important information in the world
- But there was one that came before Jesus, pointing the people of Jesus’ day to their Savior
- According to this scripture, he was foretold in Isaiah 40...

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

- Pardon for Israel's iniquity was coming
- After suffering for her sins, the nation would be comforted
- A man would come, like a voice crying in the wilderness, to prepare the way for God's messiah
- The One who would repair and restore and straighten
- This voice (this man) would declare Him
- The One that would reveal the glory of the Lord
- And whether they would accept or (as many did) reject Him, He would be seen
- This was a promise directly from God

- Details about the man doing the proclamation, John, are found in Luke 1...

5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.
12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.
13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.
14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.
15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.
16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.
17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

- John was a key part of God's miraculous intervention in human history
- He was announced by an angel, because of his unique role in preparing the way for the Messiah
- And his birth would be celebrated, because men who knew the scripture would understand his arrival meant the arrival of salvation
- His life would be totally set apart in every way for this task
- He would be filled with the Holy Ghost
- Eventually, Jesus would say of him in Matthew 11...

11 ¶ Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist:

- But he was just the messenger
- Heralding the message that Jesus was the Christ

John 1:15

15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

- This takes our minds back to verses 1-2

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 The same was in the beginning with God.

- He was before John, because He was before everything
- He was John's Creator and indeed the creator of all things
- This is why He is preferred before John
- God intends, in fact, that in all things He might have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18)

John 1:16-17

16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

- Jesus embodied grace
- Favor that is not merited
- A gift that we don't deserve
- And while the age of law showed us (showed Israel) that law-keeping could never save
- The age of grace shows us Jesus, the truth of His work and the reality of His saving power
- MacLaren's Expositions attempts to explain...

"There is no help for any soul in law. Men are not perishing because they do not know what they ought to do. Men are not bad because they doubt as to what their duty is. The worst man in the world knows a great deal more of what he ought to do than the best man in the world practises. So it is not for want of precepts that so many of us are going to destruction, but it is for want of power to fulfil the precepts.

Grace is love giving. Law demands, grace bestows. Law comes saying 'Do this,' and our consciences respond to the imperativeness of the obligation. But grace comes and says, 'I will help thee to do it.' Law is God requiring; grace is God bestowing."

John :18

18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

- Jesus is God's declaration of himself
- As Hebrews says, the "brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person"
- Or Colossians says "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"
- Or even as Jesus said himself "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father"
- Whatever is unique about Jesus' function in the world, one thing is certain: His character is ever-consistent with the Father's in every way

John 1:19-23

19 And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

20 And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.

21 And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

22 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

23 He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

- This confusion seemed to follow John's ministry
 - People wondered if He was claiming to be the Christ
 - And if not, who was he?
 - His clarification is direct
 - He is not the Christ
 - Rather, he is the one spoken about in Isaiah 40
 - The voice of one crying in the wilderness
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- The priests and Levites likely had the book of Malachi, and perhaps other accompanying scriptures in mind
 - Let's try to understand by starting in Malachi 3:1...

1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

- This is John the Baptist, he is the messenger sent to prepare the way
- But if we step forward a chapter, we see where the confusion may lie
- Specifically, in Malachi 4:5-6...

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

- The Pulpit Commentary says this of verse 5 and I am inclined to agree...

“This is not the same personage as the ‘messenger’ in Malachi 3:1; for the latter comes before the first advent of the Lord, the former appears before the day of judgment; one comes to prepare the way of the Lord, and is followed immediately by Messiah's coming to his temple; the other is sent to convert the chosen people, lest the land be smitten with a curse. There seems to be no valid reason for not holding the literal sense of the words, and seeing in them a promise that Elijah the prophet, who was taken alive from the earth, shall at the last day come again to carry out God's wise purposes.”

- Here is the reasoning behind this belief...

“...the question of our Lord's disciples in Matthew 17:10, ‘Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come.’ Christ himself confirms this opinion by answering, ‘Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.’ He cannot be referring here to John the Baptist, because he uses the future tense; and when he goes on to say that ‘Elias is come already,’ he is referring to what was past, and he himself explains that he means John, who was announced to come in the spirit and power of Elias (Luke 1:17), but of whom it could not be said that he ‘restored all things.’ The same opinion is found in the Revelation (Revelation 11:3, 6), where one of the witnesses is very commonly supposed to be Elijah.”

- Let's acquaint ourselves with that passage, starting in Matthew 17:9...

9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

- While John was not Elijah, he came (as we already read in Luke 1), in Elijah's spirit and power
- And had a very similar description
- In other words, these questions were not altogether out of the blue
- And were based on a common Jewish misunderstanding at the time

- Their confusion about John being “that prophet” seems equally common
- It could be based on Deuteronomy 18:15...

15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

- Others seemed to believe not only Elijah, but Jeremiah would precede the Messiah's coming
- We find evidence for this in Matthew 16...

13 ¶ When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

14 ¶ And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

- Whatever their beliefs, it seems they had John (and Jesus after him) often confused with someone else

John 1:24-27

24 And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.

25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

26 John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

27 He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

- There are a few scriptures in the Old Testament that describe a “cleansing” from a “fountain” (Zechariah 13:1), or being “sprinkled” and made “clean” (Ezekiel 36:25)
- But John immersed
- There may have been a simpler explanation for their question
- Barnes' Notes say this...

“Baptism on receiving a proselyte from ‘paganism’ was common before the time of John, but it was not customary to baptize a ‘Jew.’ John had changed the custom. He baptized ‘all,’ and they were desirous of knowing by what authority he made such a change in the religious customs of the nation. They presumed, from the fact that he introduced that change, that he claimed to be a prophet or the Christ. They supposed that no one would attempt it without ‘pretending,’ at least, [to have] authority from heaven.”

- This seems to be the essence of their question based on John's answer
- There comes one after me that has all authority, far beyond the simple changing of a custom
- I am not even worthy to latch his sandals

John 1:28-31

28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

- Now, beyond describing Him, He points to the messiah and calls Him by name
- He is present, physically, in John's ministry
- And His identity and mission are described

- He is a sacrificial lamb, set aside, consecrated to God
- A perfect lamb, without any spot or blemish
- One that is capable of bearing and atoning for sin
- Again, MacLaren...

“[John says] ‘the sin of the world,’ as if the whole mass of human transgression was bound together, in one black and awful bundle, and laid upon the unshrinking shoulders of this better Atlas who can bear it all, and bear it all away. Your sin, and mine, and every man’s, they were all laid upon Jesus Christ.”

- It is because of this Lamb, eternal, and preferred before John, that John ministers
- His desire is that we know Jesus’ salvation
- One which can redeem us, make us clean, and bring us into God’s forever-family

John 1:32-34

32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

33 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 which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

- John now speaks of that which is not recorded in John the Apostle’s book
- The baptism of Jesus, as it is recounted in more detail in Matthew 3, starting in verse 13...

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

- John had no doubt
- This was the Son of God

Christopher Harper, January 2021