



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 1: 19-34

Winter 2021

"Behold The Lamb"

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning to all of you. I hope you had a very enjoyable Christmas, and that you will have a great New Year in the coming days. We are continuing our studies in the Gospel of John, (we've just begun it if you're visiting). We're in chapter 1 and we're going to look this morning at verses 19 through 34. John has completed what's known as the prologue, really the introduction to this Gospel, and now we read in verse 19,

¹⁹This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know. ²⁷*It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' ³¹I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." ³²John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. ³³I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water 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.' ³⁴I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

John 1: 19-34

May the LORD bless the reading of His Word and bless our time in studying it together.

(Message) Of all the constellations in the Northern Hemisphere, I imagine the one we're most familiar with is Ursa Major, the Great Bear; or as most of us know it, the Big Dipper. It's one of the most important constellations because its two front stars always point to the North Star, which for centuries sailors used to get their direction and navigate the sea. Those two stars in the Big Dipper are called 'the pointers'.

The Bible also had 'pointers' who guided people to the "*star*". That's how Christ is described in one of the Bible's oldest Messianic prophecies where Numbers 24, verse 17 speaks of 'A *star* that will come forth from Jacob.' And as we read through the Gospel of John we see a number of 'pointers', people who bore witness to Jesus. In chapter 4 there is the woman of Samaria; in chapter 9 there is the witness of the blind man; in chapter 12 there is the crowds.

But in Chapter 1, is the first to point to Jesus as the Christ—John the Baptist. He declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (vs29). It is those wonderful words, "Behold the Lamb", that kindled the flame in the heart of

John the apostle, so that he turned and followed Him. And that's our passage this morning.

John has finished his prologue, the first 18 verses. And in it he introduced the main person, the main figure of the Gospel, and that is Christ as the eternal 'Word made flesh'. He also introduced John, John the Baptist, and his mission in verse 7; "He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him."

Now the apostle fills out that testimony by recalling an occasion when an official delegation from Jerusalem went out into the desert to ask John, "Who are you?" The question was asked, not only because of John's extraordinary activity, but also because of the times in which he lived. John appeared suddenly; and he appeared in a day of great expectation. Less than a century before, in 63 B.C., the last Jewish rulers, the Hasmonean dynasty, had fallen and the land of Israel had been incorporated into the Roman empire.

That loss of freedom and the yoke of Rome helped produce among the Jews a revival of the ancient hope of the Messiah—the king of the line of David. It also resulted in the appearance of a number of false Messiahs who had followings and produced a lot of civil unrest. Josephus speaks of them. In fact, in Acts chapter 5, Gamaliel talked about some of them and some of these incidences. So when John began his ministry, people wondered who it was out there in the desert dressed in such strange clothes like the prophet Elijah, and preaching that "the kingdom of God is at hand". (Mark 1:15).

So we read that a group of priests and Levites were sent from Jerusalem, probably by the Sanhedrin, to ask him, "Who are you?" The Sanhedrin was the ruling body in Jerusalem controlled by the high priest's family. And naturally, their envoys were priests and Levites who ministered in the temple.

John the Baptist was a Levite. He was the son of a priest and that may have contributed to his popularity and the suspicion that he was the Messiah. Some did expect, at that time, a priestly Messiah. But John rejected that immediately. "I am not the Christ," he said. (vs20). And so, they asked, "Are you Elijah?" He certainly looks like

him, with his camel hair shirt, and his leather belt. The prophet Malachi said that God would send "...Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD." (Mal 4:5).

Some 400 years had passed since that prophecy, and now, suddenly, unexpectedly, out in the desert is this man, dressed like Elijah, preaching. And so they wondered, "Are you Elijah?" He's out there preaching repentance and the Kingdom of God coming. And he responded, "I am not." Then they asked, "Are you the Prophet?" And that's a reference to Deuteronomy 18, verse 15, where Moses prophesied that God would 'raise up a prophet like him among them'. 'So are you that man?' But he denied that, too.

Well this was all pretty frustrating. Members of the committee knew that they couldn't return to Jerusalem with just a series of denials. They knew John was somebody, that he was an important person, but they'd run out of ideas. And so they asked him straight up to identify himself, "What do you say about yourself?" (vs22). And John answered that he was "a voice", (a voice prophesied in Isaiah 40), "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the LORD.' " (vs23).

John's significance was not in himself, not in his person, but in his ministry—in his function. He was 'a voice' —and that's all, But a voice that announced the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. And they were to look for Him, just as those ancient mariners looked for the North Star to guide them through dark nights on the sea—and they did that by following 'the pointers'. The pointers directed them to the star, and John was saying, 'Don't fix your attention on me! Look to where I *point*. I'm not the star; I'm just a voice. It is the message, not the messenger that is important.'

John was like a herald in ancient times who traveled out in front of the king; he preceded him and drew attention to the king. He announced the king's visit to a village or a town and told the people to get ready for the arrival of the king: 'Prepare the way for him!' Literally, "Build a road for him." In ancient times roads were rough. They were not always paved, like ours, and were especially rough in the wilderness.

Years ago, my wife and I were on the island of Crete. She was pregnant with our first daughter when we rented a car with some friends and we drove from the north coast down to the south, to the southern coast, to Fair Havens, (which is in Acts 27. Paul, on his way to Rome, stopped off there.) In some places the road was so uneven with potholes and gullies that I worried Jeanette would go into labor from the jolting and the bouncing. I'd never experienced anything like that. So the going was very slow and it was a rough ride. And that's the kind of road imagined by Isaiah: That the king's subjects would go out and repair that road. They would fill it in, they would raise it, they would level it, they would pave it, they would make the rough...smooth. They'd prepare the highway for him through the desert.

And by application, John was saying, 'Do that in your heart. It's rough, it's uneven. Your heart is a desert, full of obstacles, full of sin. Prepare your heart to meet the king.' But he, John, wasn't the king. He was no more than a 'pointer.' He was a voice, "crying in the wilderness." And they needed to listen to him. He's not important—but his message is.

Now there were some Pharisees in the delegation, probably also members of the Sanhedrin, and they had a question 'Why are you out here baptizing? If you're not the Christ, if you're not Elijah, if you're not the Prophet, on what authority are you doing what you're doing?' The Pharisees were men who were concerned about purity; ceremonial purity. They were very concerned about the rituals of the Law and observing those rituals in minute detail.

Now that was not improper; that was proper because the Law was to be kept in all of its facets, perfectly and completely. They were so concerned about that that they built up a whole system of traditions—but they were not biblical. They were designed to protect the Bible, protect the Law, and all of its rules. And so they considered these traditions something like a fence built around the Law to protect it. These men were different from the Sadducees who operated in the temple. The Pharisees were men of the synagogue. They were rabbis; they were the teachers of the people and influential

men. And they were concerned about John's baptism—especially because he was baptizing Jews.

Now baptism was not unusual; they saw a lot of baptisms. When Gentiles converted to Judaism they were baptized. It signified the removal of the pollution of their previous life. But baptizing Jews was very unusual. It suggested there was something wrong with them, that they were sinners like the Gentiles. So these Pharisees wanted to know where John got his authority to do such a thing. He wasn't a Pharisee, he wasn't a Sadducee, he wasn't educated in their schools, he wasn't part of their denomination; and he wasn't ordained. What was his authority?

John knew his authority was from God. (And he will say that later. He says that in verse 33, that 'God sent him to baptize'.) But here he responds by pointing them to the One whose way he was preparing. His response was to point them to Jesus, the Messiah. That's where his authority was, in the One who was coming, in the One whose way he was preparing. "I baptize in water," he said, "*but* among you stands One whom you do not know. *It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." (vs22-23). In other words, 'Don't wonder about me—look to Him! He's hidden among you.' His appearance, though, would soon happen and that would establish John's authority. So again, his baptism and preaching were all about pointing to Jesus, with whom John was not worthy to be compared. He was not even worthy to untie His shoes.

That statement would have resonated with these Pharisees because, among them, a student was expected to do for a rabbi what a slave would do. So these rabbis would have students that assisted them, followed them, learned from them, and they'd serve them. They'd serve them in many different ways, except taking off their shoes. But John said, 'It would be a privilege to do that for His rank is so high above that of any man.' Slave work for him was a great privilege, the greatest privilege.

The Lord's greatness is explained in verse 29, "The next day he, (*John*), saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' " Modern Christians are so familiar with that statement that they can miss

the significance of John's words. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, but John didn't identify him with any of those titles. He didn't call him the *star* of Numbers 24, or the *Light*. He didn't say, 'Behold the lion of the tribe of Judah, the Messiah.' He might have used any of those names. Instead of saying 'Behold the lion', he says, "Behold the Lamb".

This One, whose sandal John was not worthy to untie, was a Lamb. And to a sin conscious Israelite that would mean only one thing, that He, this One, was destined to be a sacrifice. Seems John had a particular lamb, a particular sacrifice, in mind as the *type*, or the *illustration* of the picture of Christ. A lamb was offered twice daily in the temple; morning and evening. This might have been his meaning. Or the 'Passover lamb.' (Luke 22:7). That's a good suggestion because Paul himself called Christ "our Passover" in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 in verse 7.

It may really have been all of those and every offering in the sacrificial system, because in a sense they all prefigure Christ, and look forward to Him as the ultimate sacrifice for sinners. But since John's mission is 'the voice' in fulfillment of Isaiah 40, it's likely that John saw Jesus as the "lamb" of Isaiah 53, verse 7, who was "led to slaughter", on whom God "caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." (Is 53:6). John recognized Him as "the Lamb", God's Lamb, and said, He "takes away the sin of the world." (vs29). He's the supreme sacrifice; the only One that truly, ultimately, takes away sin—and the world desperately needs Him.

"All have sinned", Paul tells us in Romans chapter 3, verse 23. There are no exceptions except the Lord Himself. We're all sinners. Sin is the universal problem. Mankind, womankind, is guilty and helpless. We cannot remove the guilt of sin. We cannot remove the stain of sin. Toplady, in his great hymn, *Rock of Ages*, put it so well;

 "Could my zeal no respite know,
 Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone,
 Thou must save, and Thou alone."

All of our deeds, all of our ceremonies, all of our emotional output, whatever it may be, won't take away one sin. Well, that's got to be the LORD alone who does it. And that's what He does through His Lamb; through the sacrifice, the substitute who took our place in judgment and suffered the penalty in our place. He took away our sin, He took away our guilt. —He did it.

In fact, John said, He “takes away the sin of the world!” (v29). Now that shows the vastness of God's grace. It is worldwide in its design and saving in its accomplishment. Christ was the lamb, the sacrifice for the world, without distinction of race, religion, or culture. In other words, this Jewish Messiah was not just the Savior of the Jew but of the Gentile as well.

That's the meaning of this expression, “the world”. It doesn't mean, as some suppose, ‘all men without exception’, in the sense that every individual who has ever lived, or who is alive, or ever will live is saved in this sense—has all of his or her sins taken away. We know that cannot be the meaning since people die every day unatoned and unforgiven. Obviously not everyone's sin has been taken away.

So John was not thinking of universal salvation. Or even some universal atonement in a hypothetical sense; a general provision that is conditioned on the sinner's faith, and that if that faith fails or if that faith is not exercised, then the atonement is not a success; it fails as well.

The atonement is not dependent upon the sinner. The atonement is not dependent upon what we do. It's dependent upon Christ. And what John saw in Christ is that He is the actual Savior: Not one who merely provides the possibility of salvation but the one who actually accomplished it. And you study the atonement; and you study the death of Christ, you will see it is something that accomplishes its end. And he saw in Christ the One who actually removes sin by His sacrifice—it's the blood of Christ that cleanses us. Salvation/redemption was accomplished at the cross: sin was dealt with there. Salvation is obviously applied later in each generation as, by God's grace, the elect believe and are brought to a saving knowledge. But sin was punished and taken away at the cross.

The world loves its sin and it will never give it up—not unless it's taken away. And that is accomplished only through the power of the Savior, the power of the Lamb, the power of the cross. So what John was doing in this statement in verse 29 is define the nature of God's people. It is "the world", without distinction of race or nationality; it is all kinds of people.

And John makes that clear in this Gospel, John the apostle, as the Gospel unfolds. In chapter 4 for example, Christ is the Savior of the Samaritans. They call Him 'the Savior of the world. We are included in this great work of this Jewish Messiah', they understood. In chapter 12 the Greeks came seeking Him, signaling that He is the Savior of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Christ came to reclaim the world by saving all types, all kinds of people, representatives of every nation, every tongue, every tribe, until all the nations are reconciled to Him.

The Lord's appeal is worldwide. So our mission, as His representatives, is worldwide. We offer the Gospel to all, without exception—with the confidence that those for whom Christ died, will believe. If you're here without Christ, but your troubled by your sin, (or not troubled, that's really the very worst condition to be in), know this, that sin is deadly but Christ died so that all who believe in Him would be rescued from it. So look to Him, trust in Him. And you will find when you do that, that He is the Lamb that God provided for you personally—for your atonement and forgiveness.

That's what John told the people to do. He pointed them to Christ and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God," —and that's what we're to tell people to do—we too, are 'pointers'. James Boyce told about an Englishman named Douglass Thornton, who was being sent off at a railway station in Egypt. With some difficulty, his friend found him an empty compartment on the train so he could just relax and not be bothered by the crowded train. "An empty compartment!" Thornton exclaimed, "Why man, I want to fish." And so he moved into a crowded compartment and he gave the Gospel to the Egyptians.

Well later, he was exploring The Great Pyramid on the outskirts of Cairo. And while he was doing that, Thornton evangelized his guide while they were crawling up a narrow passage. He was behind the guide and giving the Gospel—it was a perfect situation for evangelism; the guide had nowhere to escape.

Well, I know this because I've seen that in that very pyramid; I've been there. I know I've told this story before, but when you enter that pyramid, you initially step into a large vault; just kind of comforting and tall, and this large, (*speaker's arms are out stretched*). But this passage then leads to this very narrow passage that goes up into the center part of the pyramid—and into the burial chamber.

Well, I was with this group, and I did that. But I probably didn't take five steps into this chamber when this thought goes through my mind, 'Claustrophobia!' I said, "I have claustrophobia, don't I? Yes, I do!" And I had people in front of me, I had people behind me, I had tons of stone all around me—above me and beneath me. There was no escape. And so what I did was—I panicked!

Well, in order to get my mind off the situation I sang a hymn; and I sang it as loud as I could: *A Mighty Fortress*. It seemed like the proper place to sing about a fortress, and so I sang it until I finally tumbled into the burial chamber. I wasn't trying to evangelize; and I wasn't even trying to edify—and I certainly didn't. I was just trying to keep my sanity. But because of that, I can admire Mr. Thornton for his presence of mind in taking every opportunity to point people to the Lamb, even in that very odd place. Well that's what John did.

Notice also when it was, that John said, "Behold the Lamb." It was when he saw Jesus coming to him. Throughout this Gospel the Lord is presented in that way. He's presented as 'the *coming* One.' "He *came* to His own..." even though "...His own did not receive Him." (vs11). He came into a dark world, even though 'the world loves darkness rather than the Light.' (Jn 3:19). He is the God who loves sinners and *comes* to them: who takes the initiative; who makes the first move and draws us to Himself. That's the nature of God's love; it takes the initiative. That's the nature of grace—it is active.

In verse 30, John affirms that Jesus is the One whom he had been announcing, 'the *coming* One', the One who is greater than he and existed before him from all eternity. But John calls Him "a Man", you'll notice using a word that means *male*. So not just the generic man; but this is a male; and I think that's significant. "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has higher rank than I...' " (vs30).

This Gospel is about Jesus being the eternal Son of God. That's the great theme of the Gospel of John. In fact, the passage ends with that confession in verse 34, but it never loses sight of this fact. And it's an essential fact in understanding the Gospel and in understanding the work of Christ. It never loses sight of the fact that Jesus was a genuine man—a true human being. That's how He entered time and space and history.

And it was essential that He be a man in order to be the Savior of the world. Only a human person could represent us and be our substitute. And in order to understand the work of Christ and understand how salvation occurs, we must understand *substitution*—He stood in our place. He stood in our place in death, in judgment. And only a male human could do that and be what is called "the last Adam". (1 Cor 15:45). That's how Paul describes Him, meaning, 'The One who undid the ruin that Adam brought on this race through his sin.' Through His act of righteousness, Christ restored the race. But to do that He had to be like Adam, He had to be "a Man".

Well John learned that Jesus is the person that would do that at His baptism, which had occurred earlier. He said, in verse 31, "I did not recognize Him." Now he didn't mean by that that he didn't know who Jesus was. He did, He was John's cousin. He meant that until then, until that moment, until the baptism, he did not know that Jesus was the One whose coming he was expecting, and whose coming he was announcing.

But at the baptism he explains in verse 32, he saw "the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained on Him." That's when John knew that Jesus is the Messiah. When that happened, John heard a voice from heaven. This is what confirmed it to him. God spoke to him and said, '...this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'; which meant, 'The One who would establish the new covenant in His blood.'

That covenant was promised in the Old Testament. It's promised in Jeremiah 31. And it's promised in Ezekiel 36:26, when God said that He would make His people a new creation, He would give them "a new heart", He would 'anoint them with the Holy Spirit' and put that Law of Moses within their hearts. It's a whole new change of dispensation in the way God would be working with His people.

Well that began on Pentecost, when God poured out His Spirit on the church to begin a new age that will have its fulfillment when all Israel is saved. Well that's the salvation of the world, Jew and Gentile alike.

But it was at that moment, at the baptism, when God the Father spoke out of heaven, that John realized Jesus was the coming One, the Messiah. God declared it so and demonstrated it. So in verse 34, John gave his firm confession, "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." This Man is also God, the Son of God. "Very God of very God", as the old confession puts it. He must be. He could only be a sufficient Savior if, as a Man, He's also God. Only in that way could His death have infinite value and take away the sin of the world. And, for that matter, an infinite number of worlds and an infinite number of sins. He is sufficient for everything. There's no limit to the sufficiency and the power of His death and His sacrifice for us.

Now, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, that should be the greatest of comforts to you. Your salvation is a completed work. There's nothing more for you to do. It's all been done—and been done successfully and completely at the cross. There, to use Old Testament promises, He separated our sins "As far as the east is from the west", (Ps103:12), 'cast them behind His back', (Is 36:17), cast them "into the depths of the sea." (Mic 7:19). We are absolutely and forever forgiven and secure in Christ; which should give a saint, a believer in Jesus Christ, stability in the Christian life.

Stability in life, and confidence. Paul wrote in Romans 8, verse 39, that nothing will "separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." All of that is the ground for joy in life and a life of glad service to the Lord. Whenever we waver in that,

and we do, our hearts get weighed down with care and worry, with doubt, with coldness of heart. But when that happens and when we become like that, we need to look at Christ; we need to "Behold the Lamb." When we have doubts about things, "Behold the Lamb." It's the knowledge of Him and God's free and sovereign grace that instills gratitude in the heart and makes hearts burn for Him. We always need to "Behold the Lamb."

And we're looking at the New Year coming up a few days. So consider this a New Year's sermon and consider this the exhortation for the New Year: "Behold the Lamb!" Make that your object and your effort: 'To keep your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of faith'. (Heb 12:2). That's what the Author tells us we need to do to "run the race" properly. And here we can use this expression, "Behold the Lamb", continually "Behold Him", consider Him.

These words, 'Behold the Lamb', call to mind, at least in my mind they do, Genesis 22, when God tested Abraham: Told him to 'Take his son, his only son whom he loved, to Mount Moriah.' And there he was to offer him up as a whole burnt offering. It was the greatest test of faith that Abraham faced—I think than any mortal could face—and Abraham obeyed.

But as they got near the place, you'll remember, Isaac became aware of something. There was no animal for the sacrifice. He said to Abraham, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (vs7), (maybe he was beginning to suspect something). Abraham answered with the hopeful and prophetic statement, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." (vs8). And they walked on. Later, after the angel stopped Abraham's hand from that terrible deed, there was a ram, caught in the bush nearby that God provided for the burnt offering.

But it wasn't that lamb that Abraham spoke of prophetically. That would come later, when God offered up His own Son, the Son of God, to be "the Lamb of God who

takes away the sin of the world." (vs29). What Abraham was not allowed to do, God did. Because only the sacrifice that He offered, His only begotten Son, could remove sin and give salvation to the lost.

So as we close, let me ask you, have you beheld the Lamb? I mean, really looked at Him and understood who He is and what He has done: That He is God's Son, and our Savior.

If not, in the spirit of John the Baptist, I point you to Him. Only He can remove your sin and guilt. And that will happen for you at the moment of faith. What He did on the cross will become a reality for you the moment you believe—and forever. May God help you to look to Him and spend this next year considering the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for Your Son and sending Him into the world. And we thank You that He came as a real Man, with a true body and a reasonable soul. He was one of us. He is one of us.

He's also Your eternal Son. And because He came and offered Himself up in our place, as our substitute, His death covers and removes an infinite number of sins; and it obtains salvation for us.

We look to Him as the Savior, and we thank You. What we have we've received as a free gift. May we understand the greatness of Your grace and be moved to live lives in this coming year in a way that brings great honor to You. May we be *pointers*, as John was and many others have been. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)