

“Look, The Lamb Of God!”

John 1:19-34

Bryn MacPhail / Jan. 16, 2011

In ancient days, before there was facebook, email, or text messaging, there were *heralds*.

Traveling dignitaries sent *heralds* ahead of them to announce their coming and to prepare the way for their visit.

John the Baptist was such a person—appointed by God to prepare the way for the King of Israel.

My understanding is that a herald typically traveled with such an impressive caravan, and was adorned in such extravagant apparel, that when they descended upon a town they were often mistakenly thought to be the king.

John the Baptist found himself in a similar situation in that the religious leaders of the day wondered whether he might be the Messiah foretold long ago by the prophets.

It is curious that such an inquiry would be made given that there was nothing outwardly attractive about John the Baptist.

John did not dress in robes of silk, but rather, Mark's Gospel tells us that he "**was clothed with camel's hair**" (Mk. 1:6). John the Baptist, who was crudely dressed, also had an unusual diet, consisting of "**locusts and wild honey**" (Mk. 1:7).

What was it then? What prompted the religious leaders to seek John out and to ask him if he was 'the Christ'? Was it John's ability to endear himself to people?

Certainly not! Do you remember John's sermon introduction, recorded by Luke? John the Baptist begins his sermon with the words, "**You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?**" (Lk. 3:7).

John's *clothing* was crude, his *diet* was strange, and his *message* was harsh . . . and yet, there was something about this man that caused others to wonder if he might be the promised king of the Jews.

Responding to the inquiry, John the Baptist demonstrates for our edification a number of things.

- 1) First, in John the Baptist, we see *the marks of a faithful messenger of God.*
- 2) Secondly, we hear from John *the marks of the central message from God.*
- 3) And thirdly, as we survey John the Baptist's ministry approach elsewhere, *we note the urgency of making the central message known.*

I say, very intentionally, that John the Baptist's example is for *our* edification. Have a look at John chapter 1, verse 7: **“(John) came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.”**

Are we agreed then, that John is a witness—a herald of sorts?

Jump ahead in the Scriptures to Acts chapter 1, verse 8, and we read Jesus' final declaration to His followers. Jesus says: **“You will receive**

power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and *you will be My witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

So you see, present day followers of Jesus (you and I) have a similar charge to John the Baptist.

Each of us has a role to fulfill. Each of us has a part to play in the continuing expansion of God’s Kingdom **“to the ends of the earth”**. We’re called to be Christ’s witnesses, His messengers, His heralds.

To this end, let us first note *the marks of a faithful messenger*.

Immediately, we should be struck by *the genuine humility of John the Baptist*. There is no pretence with John, but rather, we find a crudely dressed man who goes to great length to establish his inferiority.

While our society encourages us to establish our credentials, John the Baptist, by contrast, seeks to minimize his credentials in order that he might better magnify the credentials of the One he represents.

John is asked directly, **“What do you say about yourself?”** (Jn. 1:22)—in other words, ‘What’s on your resume?’ John’s answer is a simple one: **“I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘make straight the way of the Lord’”** (1:23).

In a similar situation, we might be tempted to talk about ourselves—we might be tempted to talk about the positions we’ve held within the church, our Bible training, or the books we’ve read. But that’s not what John the Baptist does.

John’s message is consistent: “Don’t pay attention to me; pay attention to the One who comes after me—He is your Messiah . . . **It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie**” (1:27).

Some of you are aware that, in the ancient world, the act of untying the sandal of another was the work of a slave. And yet, John the Baptist insists that the One He represents is of such high standing that he is not worthy of even being His slave.

Again, it is not as if John the Baptist is a meek, or gentle, soul. John is no pushover! This is someone who boldly challenges religious hypocrisy; this is someone who unequivocally warns of coming judgment.

On the one hand, John is boldly preaches God's message. But on the other hand, we find that John is extremely humble when talking about his own relative importance.

John's message is constantly, "**I am not**", "**I am not**", "**I am not**"(Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:20, 21), while Jesus' message, by contrast, is "**I am He**", "**I am He**" (Jn. 4:26, 8:58).

In addition to being genuinely humble, we should also note John's *emphasis on Christ as one of the marks of a faithful messenger.*

As Charles Spurgeon has said, "The true messenger calls upon men, to see Jesus."

At first glance this seems very basic, but you would be surprised how many preachers place their emphasis elsewhere.

You might be surprised how many church leaders place their emphasis on the forms and styles of religion.

You might be surprised how many focus upon the strategies of religion.

And you might be surprised how many focus on social reform and justice issues without placing any real emphasis upon the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

But a good herald never forgets the one whom he is representing.

Following John the Baptist's example, we need to be marked by genuine humility as we seek to deliver a message to others about Jesus.

What then, is the content of this message? Or, to put it another way, what is *the central message* we are delivering?

John the Baptist begins to answer that question by way of comparison. John explains, "**I baptize with water** (1:26) ... but the One who comes after me **baptizes with the Holy Spirit**" (1:33).

Water baptism is important. John was appointed by God to baptize with water (1:33). Water baptism is one of two sacraments commanded by Jesus for His covenant people (Mt. 28:19).

And yet, John the Baptist understands that *water baptism is not the point*. John understands that *water baptism is merely representative of the baptism Jesus provides*.

While *water baptism* serves to *symbolically* unite us to God, it is the *spiritual* baptism of Jesus that serves to *functionally* unite us with God.

Symbolic union is good, but functional union is better.

And so this is why John's emphasis is on the Person and Work of Jesus.

A day after fielding questions from the religious leaders, John the Baptist is approached by Jesus.

How John the Baptist addresses Jesus provides us with even more insight into what are *central message* is to be.

John the Baptist sees Jesus and immediately declares:

“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (1:29).

We might say a million things about Jesus, but this statement aptly summarizes the mission of Jesus, which is to be our central message.

The central message, to be delivered by the faithful messenger, is that *Jesus came into the world to remove our sins and to baptize us with the Holy Spirit.*

I think many of you know the importance I place upon social reform and the need to provide for those in need. And yet, we do not hear from John the Baptist corrective exhortations for Herod and his temporal government. But rather, the message preserved for our benefit is that *in Jesus, the Son of God, we can have all our sins forgiven.*

Friends, once you have come to believe this for yourself, and once you have experienced the blessing of Christ’s forgiveness, then we must learn from John the Baptist *the urgency of sharing this message with others.*

We see John's urgency in Luke's Gospel, where he says, **"the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"** (Lk. 3:9).

It's tough to miss what is at stake here.

John is not offering a kind of philosophy that can be set aside for another day.

John is not talking about choosing an option from the worldview buffet.

This is a matter of life and death.

This is the difference between happiness and horror.

And what I'd like us to see this morning is that *the task of urgently sharing the message of Christ is to be the primary activity of the Christian Church.*

The Kirk might do a hundred good things for this community, but *if we neglect to herald for Christ we miss the main thing.*

Have a look again at John's declaration. It is massively encouraging, and it is definitive.

John the Baptist did not say, 'Look, the Lamb of God who *might* take away the sin of the world'.

He did not say, 'Look, the Lamb of God who can *potentially* take away the sin of the world'.

No, John says, "**Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (Jn. 1:29).

This is the central message which needs to be urgently shared with others.

There are aspects to John the Baptist's ministry that I do not get.

And there are aspects that I'm not interested in replicating. I don't want to dress crudely, I don't want to eat insects, and I have no desire to refer to you as a gathering of snakes.

But like John the Baptist, I do want to be a humble messenger for Christ. I want each of us to be inspired to share the message of Christ with great urgency and genuine humility.

I would love for the Kirk to be thought of in those terms.

I would love for the Kirk to be thought of as a congregation of humble messengers.

I would love for the Kirk to be known as a group that readily shares the message of Christ.

Remember friends, we are charged we delivering the best news in the Universe:

"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"