

## JOHN 1:29-42

### ST JOHN'S, 15.1.17, 9.30 am

#### INTRODUCTION

*In the beginning was the Word* (John 1:1) . . . the reading of the prologue (first 18 verses) of John's gospel is one of the highlights of the Christmas celebrations. In this passage, from later in the same chapter, John is continuing to answer the questions: 'Who is Jesus?', 'Why did he come?', and 'How should we respond?' There's a lot here about Jesus' identity, about who he is. And there's a lot about people's response to Jesus when they first encountered him. We're going to think carefully about Jesus' identity, and then briefly about what we can learn from the way the people here responded to him.

#### JESUS' IDENTITY

There are several titles given to Jesus in this passage. Let's think about what they might mean.

1) In verse 29, John the Baptist calls Jesus The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world It's hard for us to realise that this was a very strange phrase for John the Baptist to use! It may even be that he was the first person ever to call Jesus *the Lamb of God*. There are three pictures which might be in mind.

Firstly, in the mind of John the Baptist: we know from the other gospels that John thought of Jesus as someone who would exercise harsh judgment: *He has his winnowing shovel with him to thresh out all the grain. He will gather his wheat into his barn, but he will burn the chaff*

*in a fire that never goes out* (Matthew 3:12). So John the Baptist probably wasn't thinking of Jesus taking away the sin of the world by offering himself as a sacrificial lamb. But some Jewish texts referred to a warrior lamb. This image is reflected in the book of Revelation, for example in 17:14: *they will fight against the Lamb; but the Lamb, together with his called, chosen, and faithful followers, will defeat them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings*. This is what John the Baptist might have meant when he called Jesus *the Lamb of God*.

But John the author of the gospel may have had other pictures in his mind when he wrote down John the Baptist's words. After all, he was writing this down some time later. He understood that Jesus had taken away the sins of the world by dying as a sacrifice. In chapter 11, he writes about the High Priest, Caiaphas, who spoke better than he knew when he said, *it's better . . . to let one man die for the people, instead of having the whole nation destroyed* (John 11:50). Equally, John the Baptist could have been speaking better than he knew when he called Jesus *the Lamb of God*. As he wrote down John the Baptist's words, John might have been thinking of the Lord's suffering servant in Isaiah 53: *Like a lamb about to be slaughtered . . . he was arrested and sentenced and led off to die . . . he was put to death for the sins of our people* (Isaiah 53:7-8). Or, he might have been thinking of the Passover Lamb, whose blood protected the people of Israel from the angel of death in Exodus 12.

Whatever was in the mind of John the Baptist when he called Jesus *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*, we know that Jesus

takes away sin through his death on the cross. As we think about the impact that has on each of us, we need to notice firstly that Jesus is *the Lamb of God* – God himself provides the lamb for the sacrifice as a free gift to each one of us, because there's nothing we can do to take away our own sin. And we need to notice that this lamb *takes away the sin of the world* – there's absolutely nothing you or I can possibly do which will prevent us receiving forgiveness from God, so long as we receive and believe in Jesus, *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*.

2) In verse 34, John the Baptist gives Jesus another title: the Son of God. This passage is placed shortly after Jesus' Baptism, when Matthew tells us that a voice from heaven said: *This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased* (Matthew 3:17). In providing Jesus as *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*, God wasn't just providing any old lamb; he was actually providing his own Son, part of himself, to make it possible for us to be forgiven. That's how much God loves you, and that's how much God loves me!

3) In verse 38, John's two disciples give Jesus a third title: Rabbi, which as we're told, means 'Teacher'. By calling Jesus 'Rabbi', Andrew and the other disciple are showing that they recognise him as someone who is an authority on the things of God. Rabbi was quite a common title; in Matthew 23:7, Jesus condemns the teachers of the law and the Pharisees for loving to be called 'Rabbi'. But Jesus also makes it clear that he is the one true Rabbi (Matthew 23:8), and so we who are his

followers should not take notice of anything which contradicts his teaching.

4) In verse 41, Andrew gives Jesus a fourth title: Messiah. The Hebrew word *Messiah*, and its Greek equivalent *Christ*, both mean 'anointed one'. In the OT period, people were appointed to special tasks by being anointed, or given a special portion of God's Spirit for the task they were being given. The king of Israel, the high priest, and the prophets, for example, were all anointed. The difference in Jesus' case is that the Holy Spirit came down and stayed on him (vv 32,33). So Jesus is confirmed as the Anointed One, the Messiah, with a triple role as eternal prophet, priest and king.

There are three implications for us of Jesus being the Messiah. Firstly, as Messiah, Jesus has authority. He's the promised king, whose reign will last forever. If we accept him and believe in him, then we have to accept that he has total authority over our lives. Jesus is the king; we're his subjects. His job is to make the rules; our job is to obey them.

Secondly, as Messiah, the anointed one, Jesus is energized by the Holy Spirit. Although Jesus is God's Son, he's also a human being. During his life on earth, Jesus was dependent on the Holy Spirit. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus wouldn't have been able to heal people; without the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus wouldn't have had the supernatural knowledge he sometimes displayed; without the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus wouldn't have been led into the particular places and situations which he encountered during his

ministry. If Jesus needed to be anointed by the Holy Spirit in order to carry out his ministry, how much more do we need to be anointed by the Holy Spirit if we're to serve the Lord effectively? As John says here, Jesus *is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit* (v 33). That Baptism isn't an optional extra for Jesus' followers – it's an absolute necessity.

Thirdly, as Messiah, Jesus fulfils OT prophecy. There are many prophecies of the Messiah in the OT. The fact that Jesus fulfils those prophecies shows both that the OT carries the authority of God Almighty, and that our God is the Lord of human history.

## **CONCLUSION**

John the Baptist and his disciples responded to Jesus in faith, even though they probably didn't understand the implications of all they said about him. As we read about them today, we have huge advantages over them. We know the whole story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension; we live in the post-Pentecost era – the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all believers. So we have no excuse. Like John the Baptist and his disciples, we're called to recognise Jesus as *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*, accepting that there's nothing any of us can do to put right our relationship with God. Like John the Baptist and his disciples, we're called to receive and believe in Jesus our loving Saviour, who gave up so much to come and rescue us. Like John the Baptist and his disciples, we're called to listen to Jesus as our one true Teacher, accepting that Jesus' teaching has unique and absolute authority. Like John the Baptist and his disciples,

we're called to recognise and accept Jesus as the Messiah, our anointed prophet, priest and king.

One of the ways in which Jesus calls all his followers to serve him is in our witness. Like John the Baptist, we're not to count the cost to ourselves of our service and witness to our Lord. Like the two disciples, we're to spend plenty of time with our Lord – in our case, in prayer – so that we can have a close relationship with him. Like Andrew in particular, we're to bring other people to Jesus, so that they too can become his disciples and receive the right to become God's children.

None of this will be possible unless we allow Jesus to baptise us with the Holy Spirit. Only through this Baptism can we have any hope of being able to follow Jesus, to learn from him, and to make him known to our families, friends and neighbours.