

The Supremacy of Jesus
 “The Supreme Purifier of Sin”

Passages: Isaiah 53:1–7

John 1:29–36

This is the third sermon in a series entitled, “**The Supremacy of Jesus**”.

As I’ve been saying each week, these 5 sermons are designed to set the stage for our Missions Month starting on September 30th. After all, Missions month is a time when we hear from a variety of missionaries and evangelists...people who are trying to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all sorts of different cultures and social situations. **But**, before we hear from them, **we need to be convinced that the work they do is worth supporting!** We need to be utterly convinced that the missionary work of telling people about Jesus is so important and so special that it’s worth disturbing people (who may be quite happy the way they are) by encouraging them to turn to Christ!

Keep this goal in mind as we open in prayer. **Let’s pray.**

The only reason why missionaries and evangelists share Christ with people of other cultures and religions...with people who may even feel quite happy the way they are...is because **they see Jesus, not so much as a man, but as divine being!** By that, I mean that **they preach Christ because they recognise the cosmic implications of this man who is God!** This is the impetus and motivation for missionary work.

Indeed, I’m convinced that this is exactly the same vision of Christ that John the Baptist had; **a vision of the divine and cosmic Christ.** And it was this vision that motivated him to begin his mission of baptising men and women in the Jordan River!

Turn with me to today’s passage-- **John 1:29–36.**

Now, you may not be aware of the fact that John the Baptist and Jesus were second cousins. John’s mother, **Elizabeth**, and Jesus’ mother, **Mary**, were cousins. Being related in this way would have meant that John and Jesus would have, at the very least, known of each other. They may not have been able to identify each other in a crowd, but they were aware of each other’s existence.

Indeed, it is this fact that makes today's text so interesting! You see, John has been away from home for several years by now-- Many scholars think that he left home as a young man and joined the Essene community at Qumran, located in the southeast of Israel, near the Dead Sea. John was obviously a deeply religious Jew; so religious, in fact, that when he left the Essene community, he continued to live alone in the desert, dressed in clothes made from camel skins and living off the land-- on locusts and wild honey. Clearly, John was a non-conformist...a rebel...a runaway! (Some might say he was one of the earliest hippies!)

But the most important aspect of John's identity was his self-declared mission...a mission to introduce the Messiah to the world. Listen to what he says about himself in verse 23: "**I am the voice of one calling out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of for the Lord.'**" John saw himself as the one who was preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah. Moreover, in verse 31, John makes it clear that the main reason why he went out to the Jordan River was so that the Messiah might come and reveal Himself. John admits this when he says (in verse 31), "**... the reason I came baptizing with water was that he (the Messiah) might be revealed to Israel.**"

Indeed, here's the really interesting part: When John explains his role as baptiser to the religious leaders from Jerusalem, he makes it clear to them that he is preparing the way for none other than **God!** In verse 23, when John quotes from Isaiah 40, he makes this clear: "**I am the voice of one calling in the desert, Make straight the way of the LORD**". The Old Testament word, **LORD** (always in capital letters!) was a divine title, used in place of **Yahweh**, a name which Jews refused to utter! Clearly, John is waiting for God to show up! Verse 27 serves to accentuate this fact, for John says that this divine visitor is the One "**the thongs of whose sandals I am unworthy to untie!**" John is totally humbled by the thought of God arriving on earth! Then, in verse 30, John adds another element to this divine description! He declares: "**This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'**" Although Jesus was born after John, John claims that He was before him--in other words, John sees Jesus as an eternal Being; Someone without beginning or end!

Now, please remember that John is not a dummy! He was an Old Testament scholar. He studied it as a member of the Qumran community. And so, he is incredibly aware of what he is doing; that he is **preparing the way of the LORD God to appear on earth!** That's why he says he is baptising people-- in order that God might come in the flesh and reveal Himself to Israel. John is waiting and watching... anticipating a divine visitation from heaven!

This is the only way to make sense of the next few verses. You see, it's incredibly curious to see how John reacts when his own cousin, Jesus, shows up on the scene! I mean, **John doesn't recognise him as his cousin!** Just look at verse 28! The first thing John says is **not**, "Hey Jesus; long time no see! How's the family? What are you doing here?" No! John looks right through the man, Jesus. He doesn't even see his second-cousin standing there. All John sees is **a divine figure**...someone from heaven! John sees God! And it is only with this heavenly image in mind that John blurts out, **"Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"**

Indeed, in verse 31, John goes on to admit that he had no idea who this man was: **"I myself did not know him..."** It's as if John was blinded by the light of Jesus' divinity! **"Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"**

Of course, now we have to ask ourselves, "What did John mean when he called Jesus the 'lamb of God'? Where did he get this image from? As I've already said, John the Baptist was a man steeped in the Old Testament. (The Dead Sea scrolls were parchments from the Essene community at Qumran.) John would have surely drawn his words from these Old Testament writings. So, was there ever a time in Israel's history when God told His people that He, Himself, would come as a lamb to take away the sin of the entire world?

My guess is that the Baptist was very familiar with the prophet, Isaiah. (Many of Isaiah's parchments were found among the Dead Sea scrolls.) We already saw how John quoted from Isaiah 40 when defining his mission: **"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the LORD.'" It was also from Isaiah where John would have learned that God must come down from heaven in Person in order to save His people. (Isaiah 59, for**

example, says: “**So His own arm worked salvation for Him... The redeemer will come to Zion!**”)

But it’s in **Isaiah 53** where the idea of the Lamb of God takes greatest shape. Just close your eyes and listen to the poetry of Isaiah!

53 Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

²He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁴Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.

⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

⁷He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

At least two significant points come from this Isaiah’s words:

1–This lamb of God was one of the sheep of Israel. “**We all, like sheep, have gone astray**”, says Isaiah. But then, he says, “**he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.**” Isaiah makes a clear connection between this lamb and the rest of Israel! This lamb is one of God’s sheep...one of us!

2–Isaiah also says that this lamb of God has the divine capacity to take away the sin of the world. “**Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows**”, says Isaiah. “**He was**

pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” It’s clear that this is no ordinary sacrificial lamb! All the lambs that were normally sacrificed in Israel were brought to God from sinful, hurting, and broken people. They came to God with lambs in order to thank Him for His mercy and forgiveness. But this lamb reverses the flow! He comes from God to do what no other sacrifice could do—to take away, eradicate, the sin of the world.

What does this mean? It means that God, the author and giver of Life, comes down and willingly "lays down" His life for us. It is a voluntary death on our behalf. He is led as a lamb to the slaughter; He is not driven. In fact, this is the pattern of Jesus’ entire life—he gives Himself to us as a silent lamb by turning the other cheek and walking the extra mile. In the end, He goes to Jerusalem (and to the cross) willingly and silently, as a lamb being led to the slaughter.

But why does God, the Father, allow this to happen to Him? And why does He, the Son, agree for His human flesh to be put to death? The answer is found in the Triune God’s plan to rid the world of everything that is causing it to self-destruct! According to the Scriptures, death came into the world as a result of one man’s sin—that was Adam. From then on, sin spread like a disease, penetrating our world...increasingly touching everything in its path. As it spread, it has caused decay and corruption and, ultimately, death throughout the world.

When the Word of God (the second Adam) came into the world and took on flesh, He committed no sin. He came as the perfect human being and therefore the perfect Lamb; one of us, yet without blemish! Although it was totally unnatural for the Holy One of God to die, yet, it had to happen! This was the only way for God to free us from death...by taking sin and death into His own perfect, sinless human flesh and destroying it. (Isaiah 53 —**“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows... and by his wounds we are healed.”**)

This is clearly the reason why the death of the Son of God was predetermined from all eternity. It had to happen! It was the only way for the world to be salvaged and saved from the ravages of

sin. In the Book of Revelation, we're told that the Lamb of God was "**slain from before the foundation of the world**". Even the apostle Peter understood this many years later, when he wrote in his epistle that we are redeemed with the "**precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot; who was foreordained before the foundation of the world**" (I Pet. 1:20). The Triune God, in their eternal counsel, had planned from eternity that the Eternal Word should not only come down and take on flesh but that He should die to eradicate all sin from this world.

What, to me, is so amazing is that John the Baptist was let in on this divine secret three years before it happened! John understood the mission of the Messiah. John was given eyes to see that the man he was baptising was the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sin of the world. And for this reason, John became a zealous participant in that divine plan! Indeed, later on in this first chapter of John's Gospel, the Baptist tells everyone, even his own disciples, to follow this Lamb of God. Skip down to verse 35.

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus."

By the time we get to **chapter 3**, John the Baptist is literally working himself out of a job! In verses 29–31, he tells everyone who will listen,

"The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less! ³¹ "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all."

Obviously, John the Baptist had a burning vision of Jesus as **the Supreme Purifier of Sin**...the One through whom God would restore all things back to Himself and renew this broken planet to its original state of perfection!

And I would suggest that it is this same burning vision that motivates missionaries and evangelists to give up careers and comforts, and to put their family at risk, in order to tell this story of the Supremacy of Jesus to the world!

And that's why we, too, need to know be convinced of the Supremacy of Jesus! We need to see what John the Baptist saw! For without this supernatural vision we will have no interest in sending out missionaries, no desire to support them in their missionary endeavours, and ultimately no interest in sharing Jesus with our neighbours .

“Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Let's pray.