

John Chapter 1 v 19 - 34

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. That was a bit slow, actually.

The response should come a bit quicker, but anyway. We come before the Lord, and I'm going to read some words from 1 Chronicles, chapter 16, which says this, So give thanks to the Lord.

Call upon his name. Make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him. Sing praises to him. Sing psalms to him. Talk of all his wondrous works.

Glory in his holy name. Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and his strength. Seek his face forevermore.

We come this morning to rejoice in all that God's done, and we've just had the Easter services, remembering that he died and rose from the dead for our salvation.

[1 : 04] And we now come to this first hymn, which talks of that salvation. Number 122. God of salvation we adore. Your saving love, your saving power.

Let's stand and sing and rejoice as we do so. One, two, two. Let's come to the Lord in prayer.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, as we sang in that hymn, we do understand that we come this morning just to magnify your name.

Let God alone be magnified. And Lord, we thank you that as we come this morning, we come to a God who created everything that we enjoy.

As we look around and see the world and the lovely things that are in it, we just marvel that you're a God who loves his people so much that he gave us all of these things.

[2 : 16] And yet, Lord, we know that your creation will be nothing without those that you created. And we thank you, Lord, that you look over your people. And this morning as we come into this place, we know that you'll be with us, that you'll be guiding us, that you're a God who loves us.

And for that reason, we bring our joyful praise to you. We praise you for all that you've done, but we praise you most of all for the gift of your Son, who just a week ago we were remembering was willing to go to the cross and die a sinner's death, that we might have eternal life.

We thank you that not only was he raised from the dead, but he continues to be with us now, that his Holy Spirit guides us and causes us to think of all those things which we need to know.

And so, Lord, this morning we pray that we might have that peace in our hearts and that joy of knowing that as we worship you, you are with us, and that you'll be receiving that worship and hearing our prayers and our voices as we sing our praises to you.

So, Lord, bless us as we meet together, as your people, as those who are followers of you. And we ask, Lord, that our worship might be acceptable in your sight, because we pray all these things in Jesus' precious name.

[3 : 48] Amen. Amen. Can you now turn with me to our scripture reading, which is John chapter 1, verses 19 to 34.

John chapter 1, verses 19 to 34. This is about John the Baptist and his ministry and pointing towards Jesus, beginning at verse 19.

Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, I am not the Messiah.

They asked him, Then who are you? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the prophet? He answered, No.

Finally, they said, Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, I am the voice of one crying, calling in the wilderness.

[5 : 05] Make straight the way for the Lord. Now the Pharisees had been sent, questioned him, Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?

I baptize with water, John replied, But among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan where John was baptizing. The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is the one I meant when I said, A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.

Then John gave this testimony, I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

[6 : 28] I have seen and I testify that this is God's chosen one. Amen. Amen. Is there no Sunday school this morning?

Right. Well, so I can begin. I'm intrigued by the way in which you all sit far back.

And I'm wondering if there's a special button somewhere that will bring me nearer to you. I did hear of a church in America, church building in America, where as you walked in through the door, there was only one row of seats.

So naturally, people, as they came in, sat in that row of seats. Now when that row was filled, a deacon at the back pressed a button and the row moved forward.

And another row came up. And you can see what happened. As people came in, they filled the back row, then the deacon pressed a button and it moved forward.

[7 : 53] And another row popped up. And the visiting preacher came along and he heard about this and he said, this is fantastic. And he was complimenting the deacons on this brilliant building strategy of having these seats come up out of the floor and move forward.

And so the deacon said, yes, but we ought to warn you that there's also another system in this church building. If you go on longer than 20 minutes, we press a button and the floor opens up and you're right on top of the baptistry.

And it's filled. Oh well. It's not a Baptist church, is it? It is a Baptist church.

You've got to... Oh well, if I stay here, I'm safe. It's grand to be back with you.

One of the wonderful things when you move out of pastoral work is being able to go back to a congregation time and again. You build up a relationship. And I've never been very happy about sort of flitting around from one church to another just for one or two offs.

[9 : 09] So it's lovely and I'm really grateful that you've invited me to come back again and to anticipate a bit of a summer with you as well, God willing. Now, in that reading we had, there's a very famous verse, isn't there, where John the Baptist, in John chapter 1 it is, recorded in the Apostle John's record, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and announced to the crowd that was with him, look, the Lamb of God who is taking away the sins of the world.

It says who's taking away, it's a present continuous, he's in the process. We can now say, look to Jesus, he has taken away, it's done it.

But at that point, John says, behold the Lamb of God, see, the Lamb of God was taken away, he's taking away the sins of the world.

Lovely, lovely introduction of Jesus to the people of Israel. But have you ever wondered how it is that John the Baptist knew this about Jesus?

He says in his own words that he knew he was the Son of God, he knew he was special, he knew he was the coming one, he knew he was the promised one. But that expression, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, where did that come from?

[10 : 54] Where did John come to that understanding? John was a very wonderful character, a very fine man of God.

He was quite unique because the scripture says he was filled with the Holy Spirit even within his mom, even as he was developing and growing within mom, he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

I think he's the only person that's recorded of having that particular blessing, the Holy Spirit in him, power and influence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit there within him from birth, before birth.

God but how did he come to conclude that the one who was the Son of God, the one whom he knew was the Messiah because of the testimony, God had told him, hadn't he?

God had told him in the wilderness someone will come and when that person is baptized, you'll see a dove-like form. representing the Holy Spirit, anointing him as Messiah.

[12 : 25] Messiah means anointed. He's the anointed of God, the Messiah of God, the Christ. Christ is just the Greek equivalent to Messiah and our anointed.

He knew he was special, but how did he know that he was the Lamb of God who was going to take away the sins of the world? God had revealed the truth and John was in a very, very special position because he'd been studying the Old Testament, the Bible that they had at the time.

He'd been studying that. His dad was a priest. He would have access to the scriptures. He would be able to go into the temple. He was in the priestly line. So he would study the Bible and he studied the Old Testament.

In the wilderness he spent hours and hours and hours thinking about it, praying about it, talking to God about it. And God the Holy Spirit showed him how to connect the threads of the Old Testament, how to connect the themes of the Old Testament, and the wonderful things that God was promising, such as the king in Genesis 49 and 10, Shiloh, the great pacifier, peacemaker, king, and that one who would come through the line of David and be the real king, the great king, the one who would be the prophet that Moses promised, or God promised through Moses, the word of that prophet whose words would be absolutely infallible, and could be trusted completely, they would be the very word of

God, and there's lots and lots of those themes, great themes that follow through, and John was privileged to be the first person that drew all those strands, all those themes, down to one individual, the promised Messiah of God.

[14 : 51] He knew, John knew, that Jesus was the Lamb of God. But where did the teaching all start about the Lamb of God?

How far back does it go? Can you think of a prophecy about a Lamb? can you think about a type, a picture, an image of a Lamb that would immediately come to your minds when you think about the Lamb of God?

You've probably heard many, many stories and many, many sermons and many illustrations and read many, many passages about the Lamb. What comes to mind? Do you think of the Passover in Egypt?

Would that be something that would come to your mind? A wonderful Passover there in Egypt where a Lamb had to be sacrificed and the blood of the Lamb had to be painted around the arch of the door over the lintel and side posts?

Or do you go further back? Do you go back to Genesis 22 and think of Abraham? Or can you go further back from that to think about Cain and Abel?

[16 : 17] Maybe we ought to start at the beginning and just whip through them just to get a bird's eye view of the thread that's going through that's going to help us to understand how and on what ground John can say look it's the Lamb of God who's taking away the sins of the world.

How far back can we go? We've gone back to Cain and Abel. We can't really go any further although there is a little bit of an intriguing hint.

It doesn't actually say but do you remember when all our problems started? God had created human beings those first human beings Adam and Eve and it is absolutely true.

You can always rely on the person who's there to tell you what happened and God tells us what happened and there was a real Adam and a real Eve and they were given the opportunity to enjoy God and live with God, love him and serve him as friends of the living God their creator.

But he wanted to test them. God was determined. He wanted them to choose to love him, to choose to obey him rather than be just trained and as it were computerized, geared up and wired up to do it.

[18 : 04] And when they were given the opportunity to decide, they made the wrong decision. Tragically, they listened to the enemy of God and when God had said, you can enjoy the fruit of the trees, you can enjoy the product of the earth, but there's one thing I don't want you to do.

I don't want you to eat of the fruit of that particular tree. It's a simple thing, isn't it, really? You would have thought having so much to enjoy, it would have been easy for them, but they did.

They listened to the enemy whispering not to obey God. and that's where problems all started and sin came into the human heart, took up residence, and consequently all the descendants of Adam and Eve were all with that bias from birth, a bias that takes us away from God, a bias that gives us a longing to do things that God disapproves of.

And Adam and Eve reacted when they realized they'd done wrong. They were frightened of God, they were hid away from God, and one of the things they did was they realized that they had no clothing on, and it wasn't an issue at all there, there was no issue at all, that's how they were, and no shame or embarrassment whatsoever, but as soon as they rebelled against God and disobeyed God, they felt ashamed, ashamed in themselves, they wanted to cover, they wanted to hide themselves, and so they made leaves and tried to make leaves to cover them.

What did God do? do you know? When he faced them and dealt with them, God provided better clothing, didn't he? You remember what that clothing was?

[20 : 24] It was skins. So the first death that occurred was an animal. God killed an animal.

man, and I'm longing to ask the Lord one day, was it a lamb? Because it looks as though through things are going in the scriptures, that that first death was a lamb.

let's move to Genesis 4. In Genesis chapter 4, Cain and Abel, first sons, the sons of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and they were about to worship God.

You may remember the story, the account, the history, they were going to worship God. And Cain, well, he was a gardener.

And he brought vegetables. So he comes along with his carrots and his cabbage, picking the best that he could from his garden, and he brings these as a gift to God when he comes to worship.

[21 : 42] Like having a harvest festival. And Abel, well, he was a shepherd, and he brought a lamb as a gift.

for God. And we're told in the history, in the inspired history, that God accepted and was pleased with Abel's offering and his gift, the lamb.

But he wasn't pleased with Cain's gift. That does seem really unfair, doesn't it? it really does seem very unfortunate.

After all, Abel was a shepherd, it was natural for him to bring a lamb. And Cain, he was a husbandman, he was a gardener, it's natural for him to bring the produce of the land, isn't it?

And if that was all that we had in the Bible, we would be left thinking, it does seem unfair, Lord, that the one was lucky to be a shepherd, and the other was unlucky to be a gardener.

[22 : 58] But there's a lot more to it than that. There are lots of things went on between God and Adam and Eve and God and Cain and Abel and God and people of the Old Testament period that are not written in this book.

A lot of things. And it's quite evident that Abel was not simply bringing a lamb from his flock because he was a shepherd.

But he was bringing a lamb from his flock because he was a believer in the true God and wanted to do God's way. And we know this very definitely from the New Testament.

If you go to Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 4, I think it's verse 4 of Hebrews 11, where it says, By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than his brother Cain.

By faith Abel offered. So he's done it as an act of faith. But what is faith in the Bible?

[24 : 11] It's not guesswork. It's not chance. It's not good luck. faith in the Bible is always, always attached to obedience.

And faith is always responding to something God has said or done. It's believing what God says.

That's faith. But not just believing it. Bible faith is believing what God says and acting upon it. Something that's often missed these days.

I tend to think that faith is something in your head or in your heart, but it's in your will as well. You do something. If God says you have to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, then believing is not simply, well, I believe he existed.

It's not even believing he's the son of God. It's not even believing that he is the savior of sinners and the only way to God. It's doing something and responding and entrusting ourselves over to God.

[25 : 33] Entrusting ourselves to the Lord. It's committing ourselves, giving ourselves to him. Faith is doing, believing and doing.

So, if we go back then, if that reasoning is true throughout the whole of the Bible, faith and obedience always belong together, we can say confidently that Abel and Cain knew what God required in worship.

Noah sacrificed. Abraham sacrificed. But there's no command or instruction about sacrificing.

Lambs were sacrificed. God must have told the people that that was what he required. So we have two brothers then, Cain and Abel.

And Abel, doing what God requires, brings a lamb. What should Cain have done? Well, God says to him, why is your countenance fallen?

[26 : 42] Why are you looking so miserable? If you do well, won't you be accepted? Sin is crouching at the door.

It's there, ready to pounce on you. It's desirous to have you and take hold of you and control you. Resist it. So what is God saying? He says, you've got every chance.

Cain, you can do right, you can follow your brother and you can do what I require, you can believe and do, obey and you can worship. And Cain could have quite easily said to his brother, may I have a lamb that I may?

And if his brother wanted to make a deal, well, alright, you give me some of your vegetables and that's fine or we'll work out an arrangement. Cain wanted to worship God his way on his terms.

And there are still quite a lot of people in this country who have the same mentality and the same attitude. They want to worship God their way. And we talk with people on the streets about needing to get right with God and needing to believe in the Lord Jesus to be able to get right with God.

[27 : 59] They say, oh, God is a God of love. I'm a good person. And they think they're good enough.

They believe they're good enough. And so they live their lives thinking that one day if they're in the presence of God, well, he'll just look at them and say, oh, you're lovely, come on in.

And it just doesn't work like that. God is offended by our behavior. God is appalled by some of the things we say and some of the things we do and some of the things we think, because he can read your mind as clear as anything.

Just mine too. And he's provided a way in Jesus. He's provided a lamb.

As Abel was able to bring a lamb to sacrifice as an offering to God, so we discover that Jesus is the real one, the one that was symbolized in that lamb, who at Calvary dies to deal effectively with sin and open the way to God to all who will repent, all who will say sorry, all who will apologize for what they've been and what they are, and trust themselves, entrust themselves to the Lord Jesus.

[29 : 42] so Abel is a wonderful illustration in the bringing of that sacrificial lamb, of what will happen years later in the coming of Jesus.

But then we can move on from Genesis 4 and we can go into Genesis 22 and Abraham, do you remember that? Abraham, that wonderful story, well, disturbing story, really distressing story for Abraham, one day there's that young man, that gift of God to Sarah and Abraham, the one they'd been longing for and praying for for years and years and years.

They'd lost hope, naturally speaking, but God had told them they were going to have a son. And when they had that son, they saw that son growing up and they must have been so thrilled to see the living reality of God's promise.

grace. But then God, when that boy was in his teens, God says to Abraham, now take your son Isaac, take your son whom you love.

And I want you to sacrifice him on a mountain that I'll show you. Can you imagine the heart of Abraham? take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and offer him on a mountain that I will show you.

[31 : 22] Abraham was a man of faith. Faith needs obedience. A man of faithful obedience. The obedience of faith.

And so he does what God instructs him to do. But this man of faith has so much faith that, as Paul tells us in his writings, Abraham had so much faith to believe that because the promises of God were linked with that boy, because God had given his word of the promises that would come through that one for all the earth, Abraham believed that even if he went and got so far as to bring the knife down to kill his son, God would raise him up.

Isn't that fantastic faith? So he goes forth and he's got this mixture, no doubt, the mixture of, it's hurting, really, really deeply hurting the prospect.

He's grieving, yet on the other hand, a complete trust in God and just not knowing quite how things are going to work out. And as he's walking along the road with his son, they walk for three days, he's walking along the road and his son is there and his son raises the question, Dad, there's the wood here and the fire, where's the lamb for the burnt offering?

See? Who told them about it? needing a burnt offering. Where's the lamb for the burnt offering? Abraham says, Genesis 22 verse 7, he said, Son, God will provide for himself a lamb for the burnt offering.

[33 : 15] God will provide for himself a lamb. When he came to that moment, he looked around and he saw in the bushes a ram caught with its horns.

Just before that, as Abraham was about to kill his son there on the altar, I've got to cut it short a little bit and cut the corners because I could keep you here until tea time, but I've got to come back tonight.

I could run it through, I suppose. Have you got any sandwiches with you? Just as he's about to bring the knife down on his son, God intervenes and he says, Stop, now I know.

And that's when he turned and saw the lamb, the ram caught in the thicket and he sacrificed the ram and his son was set free. When God said to him, Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love.

it's almost like God is rubbing the salt in the wound, isn't he? He's really piling it on really thick and hard. But he's not really doing it to hurt Abraham.

[34 : 34] He's doing it to tell us something about himself because Abraham didn't sacrifice his son. That was within sight of the very spot where God took his son, his only son, Jesus, and offered him as the final ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice that really does deal with sin once and forever.

He took his son, his only son, whom he loved. So we move from Genesis.

We've seen Abel, Exodus, Moses, Genesis, and then we come through to Isaiah, Isaiah 53, and we read there that the Messiah Christ is led like a lamb to the slaughter.

And it's the discovery that the sacrifice that God has ordained has not got four legs, but to the man, the man, the man, Messiah, the Christ, who will be suffering, who will be dying for sin, who will be made an offering that will deal effectively with sin.

John was privileged to piece it all together and see the thread through and to be able to say this is the real sacrifice, this is the real solution, this is God's solution.

[36 : 27] Behold, look, the Lamb of God, Jesus, the Christ, Son of God, King of Israel, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, this is God's beloved Son.

God has given up his Son, spared him not, and that Son has come willingly, the eternal Son who has always existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit, existed in that never beginning future, became a human being, the greatest miracle that has ever happened, he became a human being, he became the God man, truly God with all the attributes and powers of God, the Father himself, and yet he became a human being like you and me, a real human being, a human being that could be tired, a human being that could feel pain, a human being who could be hungry, a human being who could be hurt, and moved by compassion, a real human being, but with one significant difference, he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, but he wasn't made sinful flesh, he had no flaw like you and I have within, he was holy and righteous, pleasing to God in his mind, as well as his mouth, from his mouth, and in his body, pleasing to

God always, at all times, sinless, holy, upright, and yet he experienced everything just like we do, what a savior, and we say, here this morning, look, the lamb of God, who really does take away the sin of the world, but if you're going to benefit, you need to have faith, and you need to put your trust in Jesus Christ, you need to acknowledge your failure before God, admit your faults and failings and the way you've offended God, anything you can remember, your sins and offenses to God, put it all out to him in private, in secret, put it all out, and ask him to forgive you, and he will, whatever you've done, whatever you've said, whatever you've thought,

God will forgive, if you repent, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's sing a hymn.

Number 236, 236, come and see, come and see, come and see the king of love, see the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears, soldiers mock, rulers sneer, as he lifts the cruel cross, blown and friendless now, he climbs towards the hill.

[40 : 24] 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, 236, our father God, we know that it honors you as we honor him and that through him, dear God, through our wonderful Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we worship and adore you, Father, great God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, we worship.

thank you for such a great salvation. Thank you for giving us in Jesus Christ new life when we come and entrust our old lives to him.

Part us, dear God, in your grace and peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.