

Monday **Week 30** **John's Introduction of Jesus' Ministry**

Bible Reading: John 1:6-8

Q. 117 Who did God send to bear witness of the Light?

A. God sent John to bear witness of the Light.

When you turn on a light switch, you expect to have your room lit up. That is because you are connected to the electricity that comes from the power company. When the power company needs to change something about how electricity is used in your house, they will often call ahead. They will tell you why someone needs to come, what they will do, who is coming and when they will come. That way your family will know to expect a worker from the company, and you will recognize who that stranger is.

Before Jesus started his ministry, God sent someone to announce that Jesus was coming. The man God sent was named John the Baptist. He probably seemed a little strange by the way he dressed. He also preached to the people. As he was preaching, he introduced Jesus to the crowd of people who came to hear him.

Thinking Deeper

When a new political candidate wants to be introduced he will often find someone who is well known and well respected to do the introduction. He may choose a successful businessman, a public official, a war hero or a famous sports figure. He wants someone to introduce him who will give him credibility. When Jesus began his ministry, God sent a rather unusual person to introduce him. He didn't send a politician or a sports figure or a businessman. He sent a strange figure, dressed in camel's hair, whose diet was locusts and wild honey.

Jesus was introduced by John the Baptist. John was actually related to Jesus. John's mother was Elizabeth, who was Mary's cousin. John had been preaching to large crowds. He had a group of disciples who followed him. He had a very compelling message that connected to the people in an unusual way. John had been baptizing people who were convinced by his message. Now he turned their attention to Jesus. God sent John for the specific purpose of introducing Jesus when it was time for Jesus to begin his ministry.

Bible Reading: John 1:19-28

Q. 118 Who did John the Baptist say he was?

A. John said he was a voice crying in the wilderness.

A French government official met with several businessmen to talk about the problem of maintaining the Eiffel Tower. After the meeting he sold the great French monument to a scrap metal dealer for cash. The trouble was, the man who took the suitcase full of money was not a French official, but a man named Victor Lustig. He was what is called a con-artist, or an impersonator. He pretended to be somebody that he wasn't.

People didn't understand who John the Baptist was. They asked him if he was the Messiah. He said no. They asked if he was Elijah. He said no. When they kept asking who he was, he said he was one sent to prepare the way for the Lord. John was not the one people were to follow. He said, "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose" (Mark 1:7). John the Baptist came to help people see that Jesus was the savior.

Thinking Deeper

An aria in Handel's Messiah highlights the words "Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain." Handel's exaltation of Jesus recognized the message of Isaiah that was echoed by John the Baptist as he proclaimed the Christ. Isaiah's prophecy indicated that a voice would cry in the wilderness when such blessings were imminent. John the Baptist was that voice.

It is one thing to see the fulfillment of prophecy. It is another thing to be the fulfillment of prophecy. John the Baptist saw the fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus. Jesus was the promised Messiah. John's purpose in ministry was to point out Jesus as the one who fulfilled prophecy. But John was also personally a fulfillment of prophecy. He was the voice in the wilderness. He was the one who was making straight paths in preparation for the Messiah. He was proclaiming the message that all men should repent. The first step to entering that "straight gate" that leads to life is to repent. John the Baptist proclaimed it, just as the prophet said he would.

Bible Reading: John 1:29-34

Q. 119 How did John introduce Jesus?

A. John called Jesus the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

Many years ago, when doctors made house calls, a little boy was sick. The boy's mother was concerned so she called the family doctor. The doctor came to visit the boy. When the doctor came to the house, the mother said, "This is Dr. Ishler. He's here to see what's wrong and try to help you get better." The doctor checked the boy and told the mother what to do. Soon, the boy was better. When Dr. Ishler came to his home, the most important thing the boy needed to know about him was that he was there to help him get well. Other things about Dr. Ishler may have been interesting, but that was the most important thing.

When Jesus came to begin his ministry, John the Baptist told people to look at him. He was going to tell the most important thing about Jesus. John said he came to take away the sin of the world. That is why he came. That is the most important thing people need to know about Jesus. Jesus came to take away our sins.

Thinking Deeper

When John said "Behold the Lamb of God" he was not directly quoting a specific Old Testament prophecy. Neither was John introducing something novel to the Jewish mind with his reference to a lamb taking away sin. They knew about lambs and sin. It was part of their life to take a lamb and have it offered as a sacrifice on an altar as an offering for sin. What John did was to tie together the familiar image of a lamb offering to this specific person as the One who could really take away sin. He was pointing to Jesus as the archetype of sacrificial lambs. All the other lambs that had ever been sacrificed for sin had only been representative of this Lamb, who John identified as the Lamb of God. Jesus was the sacrifice that would satisfy the requirement of God's justice. Sin must be paid for by death, and Jesus would die for all men. Jesus, John said, would "take away the sin of the world." If we are to take this imagery seriously, we can think of a man taking a lamb for his household and bringing it to be slain so that the blood of that lamb can be used as atonement. But instead of a man, now God brings His Lamb to be sacrificed, not for just one household, but for the whole world.

John made a glorious introduction with those words, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

Bible Reading: John 1:35-42

Q. 120 How did John turn his own disciples to Jesus?

A. John continued to point them to Jesus as the Lamb of God.

S. D. Herron was the founder of Hobe Sound Bible College. He spent time and energy getting young people to go to the Bible College in Florida. Students came and greatly admired "Mr. Herron." Then the day came when the students graduated. They left the college to go to the place they felt called to serve Jesus Christ. Brother Herron didn't want them to go to Bible College so they would stay there. He was preparing them to go out, and he was happy when they went to serve the Lord.

As John the Baptist was preaching, he had his own group of followers. When Jesus came, John pointed his followers to Jesus. Jesus was the Messiah. John was happy when his disciples followed Jesus.

Thinking Deeper

A mission organization sent a missionary to a foreign field to start a work. He went to a remote city and began working on getting people to come to his church. The missions group helped him with finances and encouraged his efforts. Now the rest of the story: this new work was started in a small city within a few blocks of where another group of the same doctrinal persuasion already had a church. With a whole world to win, they chose to go where they could possibly get the benefit of the labors of others. What kingdom were they really building?

Instead of trying to steal someone else's disciples, John the Baptist encouraged his disciples to follow another. He didn't do that because he was tired of the ministry. He didn't do it because he was angry at his disciples. He had found the Messiah! He wanted his disciples to follow Him. John understood his place in the kingdom of God and did his part to see it advanced. We would do well to follow that example.

Friday

Week 30

John's Introduction of Jesus' Ministry

Review the week's questions.

Q. 117 Who did God send to bear witness of the Light?

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Q. 118 Who did John say he was?

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Q. 120 How did John turn his own disciples to Jesus?

A. John continued to point them to Jesus.

Three brothers went to a tent meeting with their family. It was the first night of the effort, and they didn't know what to expect of the preacher. They sat back in the seats, wondering if they would be bored or not. They were in for a surprise. This preacher played the accordion like they'd never seen or heard. He played it like a showman, moving back and forth with the music, playing loud and soft, grand and quiet. The boys were amazed. Then he preached. He was in the pulpit, then among the pews. He preached in an excited voice. He told interesting and funny stories. By the second night, those three brothers were sitting on the front row. This preacher had their attention.

When John the Baptist came preaching, he was not a normal rabbi. He looked different, preached in a different way and even ate different food. He got the people's attention. When he introduced Jesus as the Messiah, many people heard his message. God chose an interesting man to introduce His Son.

Thinking Deeper

A group of young people went to a Pennsylvania drive-in eatery and set up a platform with lights. They sang lively songs, gave testimonies and then a young man preached a fiery message. Dozens of young people listened to the message. At the end, a young man approached the group. "Why are you so excited?" he asked.

"If we weren't excited, how many of you would have listened?" answered one of the evangelists.

"You're right," said the youth. "I guess your method worked."

John the Baptist was likely considered unorthodox in his method. "Repent!" he preached to the sinners of his day, and they came to be baptized. "You generation of vipers," he scolded the religious hypocrites, and told them to bring fruits of repentance. He was stern, he was strong, he was different, and he had crowds listening. He got his message across. That is most likely why God chose him for his specific task.

As Christians we would do well to have enough passion to cause the lost to at least listen to what we say. We don't need wildfire, but we do need fire. We could learn from John the Baptist, the one who prepared the way for Jesus, the Messiah.