

10/16/17, Encountering Jesus- John the Baptist: John 1, 3

Todd and I traveling to Dallas for Marriage Ministry Conference. Met Flight Attendant, Diana. Conversation...

Diana had many encounters with religion over the years, many encounters with religious people, many encounters with church and rituals and spiritual words and phrases and even occasional prayers... but Diana had never had an encounter with Jesus. Many, many people come in and out of the doors of churches encountering religion and never encounter Jesus. We could have 2000 people, pack out this place every Sunday but if we never lead people to encounter Jesus we have failed miserably and we are wasting our time and yours. Our mission as a church- introduce people to Jesus and help them follow Him. It is our desire that every person in the Brandywine Valley would encounter Jesus and enter into a personal relationship with your creator, following Him for the rest of your life and into eternity. That's it. And this is the goal of the Bible- it all points to Jesus. That we would encounter Him through the pages of this amazing, living, supernatural book.

John 20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

We want to go on a journey together through the rest of the year through selected stories from the Gospel of John of people that encounter Jesus. The people that Jesus encounters through the Gospel of John are people just like you and me. They are people who have scars from the past. They are people that feel unworthy, rejected and insignificant. They are people that are defined by their failures, sicknesses and dysfunction. But they are also people that think they have it altogether, people that think they don't need to encounter Jesus because they appear morally superior, people that are important and powerful. No matter who you are, what your story- we are meant to insert ourselves into the story so that we can encounter Jesus. Pray.

John chapter 1. first person in the gospel of John that encounters Jesus is John the Baptist. First we are going to read the story of John the Baptist's encounter with Jesus and then we are going to roll all of this forward and see how encountering Jesus changes our lives. Pick up the beginning of John's narrative in verse 19.

John 1:19-23

Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.

The gospel writer jumps right in. He doesn't even tell us the backstory of John, who he is, what he was doing, why the Jewish leaders were coming out to question him. He just jumps right to the part of the story that is most essential his point. But we know from the other gospels that John was the cousin of Jesus, he was a prophet and he was calling people to repentance in preparation for the coming of the savior that

was prophesied in the Old Testament. After 400 years of silence, God speaks through John the Baptist. This is significant! Matthew's gospel tells us that people were coming from all over Israel to hear John preach and be baptized as a sign of their repentance.

And so the Jewish leaders (pharisees and priests) from Jerusalem come out to other side of the Jordan because they catch wind that this guy is making quite the stir. Everyone is coming out to see this guy preach! They are lining up to be baptized, he has a posse of his own disciples following him at this point. The more you read the gospels the more you expect that the religious leaders will not like this. And so they come out to interrogate him. Who do you think you are? Listen the way John responds.

²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."

²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

Do you find this dialogue odd? Shouldn't this have been a quick conversation? Who are you? I'm John, son of the priest, Zechariah. But this really isn't the question they didn't care about his name and John knows that. The religious leaders want to know are you someone important and do you have any authority? Are you claiming to be the Messiah, the deliverer? OK, if not the #1 guy, are you claiming to be the #2 guy, Elijah? The Jewish leaders revered Elijah and it was prophesied in Malachi 4:5-6 that an "Elijah" would come to inaugurate the Messiah. He says nope I'm not a #2 guy, they say, well what about a #3 guy- The Prophet. This was from Deuteronomy 18, predicted that this Prophet would conquer their enemies. Acts tells us that the Prophet's true identity is actually Jesus. So that are asking, "Are you a somebody?" And John is basically answering, Nope. All I am is a voice calling in the wilderness... All I am is pointing to the Messiah, that's it. This is a direct quote from Isaiah 40:3. Just a voice. He takes this point even further.

²⁴ Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

If you are a nobody, just a voice, then what makes you think you can do what you are doing? John doesn't really answer their question.

²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

He doesn't even bother justifying himself. He doesn't go down his list of credentials... and he could have, he had them! Doesn't answer the question. Instead he compares himself to the lowest of servants in their day. In those days the lowest of servants would untie the straps of the sandals of their masters and wash their feet. John is saying, I'm below that, I'm not even worthy to do that for the Messiah. Who am I? I'm just an unworthy servant of the one who is coming.

John just keeps pointing away from himself. He has this huge ministry, his own disciples, lots of success and all he's doing is pointing away from himself. I'm nobody, just a voice, lowly servant...why? Because he encountered Jesus.

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'

³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.

³³ 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 will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

There is so much here that I could preach a whole series on just these few verses. When John sees Jesus, why does he call him "the Lamb of God?" Lamb of God makes no sense unless we've read the Old Testament. Certainly, given how he used it, John must have been using the imagery of the pure, sacrificial lamb required to overlook the sin of the people of Israel. But I believe in this statement is far more than that-

Remember when God tells Abraham that from his seed the nations would be blessed? Then he has a son, Isaac...only God tells him to sacrifice his one and only son to test Abraham's faith?

Genesis 22:7-8

*"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"
⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."*

Did God provide the lamb to Abraham as a substitutionary sacrifice instead of Isaac? No, instead he provided a ram. So where's the Lamb that God himself will provide?

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

God laid on Jesus, the pure lamb, once and for all the sin of us all. Because of his great love for us. John the Gospel writer puts this in his Gospel so that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he is truly the one who takes away our

whole rap sheet of sin. Do you believe that? Or do you still think you are your own savior? Trying to earn your own way?

This encounter with Jesus again leads John away from himself to the one far greater—who he testifies is the Messiah. You see the pattern? I want to show you one more really powerful example of how John's encounter with Jesus impacted him. The last time John the Baptist shows up in this Gospel is in chapter 3.

John 3:26

They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

These followers of John basically come and imply that Jesus is taking John's spotlight. Clearly they don't quite get Jesus' identity. But they seem discouraged that everyone is leaving them in order to follow Jesus. "John you need to do something, our ministry growth projections can't sustain these losses, we need to turn this around!" Maybe you say, well how do you know that's what they are implying? Look at John's response. He uses a metaphor of a wedding ceremony.

²⁹ 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."

John says, "You want to know what I think of my ministry fading away? To me it's like I'm at my best friend's wedding!" When the bride comes and joins the bridegroom everybody looks away from the friend opening the door of the church. The cameras are flashing all in that direction. The rice is all flying in that direction. The honeymoon is in that direction. And I couldn't be happier, my joy will be complete. He must increase...I must decrease. I must fade out into the background. And these are the last words of John the Baptist in the book of John. He's just out of the picture...poof! Fade to black.

This kind of attitude goes against all human nature. John built up a successful ministry, he's a powerful preacher, people are being impacted and changed, he has influence, followers...and then lets it all fade away with a smile on his face? This is not normal. Both John the Baptist and John the author want us to see that the only explanation for this phenomenon is an encounter with the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Savior, the only one who takes away the sin of the World.

What is in here for us today? Just one point.

Encountering Jesus shatters our self-importance and joyfully focuses all the attention on the Savior.

Example of Saul encountering Jesus.

2 Corinthians 4:5 What we proclaim is NOT ourselves, but JESUS CHRIST as LORD.

Out of John's mouth are not self-exalting words but Jesus-exalting words. I am not the Messiah, just a voice. Not worthy to untie his sandal, He ranks before me, He is the Lamb of God, He's the bridegroom, I'm just a friend, I must decrease, he must increase.

When we encounter Jesus, all of a sudden our own agendas, our own status, our popularity, our sense that we are so necessary and important begin to decrease, fade away in light of "Beholding the Lamb."

Can I confess that I need to hear this sermon today? There is an insidious danger to preaching and teaching and having a crowd listen to you, to experience any kind of "success." You can subtly think it is about you and wrap your whole identity around it, that I'm so important...that instead- I must increase, and others must decrease.

And I thought to myself, "What if God brought massive spiritual rival to Wilmington, but it was at a church down the road and you all started going there?" And I repented of my self-importance because all that matters is that people are "beholding the Lamb, whether at our church or somewhere else!" You may not be a pastor of a church but I'm guessing you struggle with the thought of "decreasing", we all tend to feel like we are the center of our own universe. What has the power to shatter that self-righteous, prideful idea? Only an encounter with someone far greater- Jesus Christ. Is he the center of your life? Is he the one your life points to? Or is it pointing to yourself, your own necessity and desires and clout?

So let me talk to the spiritual leaders in our church right now. Small group leaders, mentors, deacons, teachers,

-Are you pointing people to their need for Jesus or their need for you?

-Are you calling people to "Behold the Lamb of God? Or "Behold, me"

Example of phone call.

May encountering Jesus shatter our self-importance so that we can place all the attention on the Savior. "Behold, the Lamb of God!"