

## **John the Baptist – the Voice in the Wilderness**

The Voice is a popular television talent singing show that has the judges not seeing the contestants but judging them solely on their voice. They listen intently and you can see by the expression on their faces if the voice has touched their soul.

We've looked closely at some of Israel's great leaders, now we move closer to Jesus as we approach Easter and we come to the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist.

An important verse for Scripture and for John the Baptist is the last words of the OT.

### **Malachi 4:5-6**

<sup>5</sup>“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. <sup>6</sup> He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

400 years or so had elapsed since those words were spoken by God into the future and all Israel waited and waited for the rerun of Elijah.

And suddenly onto the scene, in the desert, a lonely figure wearing camel hair clothes, eating locusts, preaching a gospel of repentance burst onto the centre stage of Israel...could this be the one!

Israel wondered and they came out in their thousands to the lonely isolated desert near the Jordan and they asked the question of this lonely figure...

Who are you? Are you the One?

They waited with bated breath...Is this the Messiah, is this the prophet Elijah? Is God about to act?

Then came his answer....

*I am not....*

*I Am Not the Messiah....*

Jesus declared John the Baptist to be the greatest man who ever lived. Yet, John makes sure we know that he is not worthy to even perform the lowliest servant function of loosening Jesus' sandals. *I am not the Messiah.*

Throughout John's gospel, we get insights into who Jesus is....with all the *I Am* sayings, unique to John's gospel.... I Am, I am the Gate, I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the Good Shepherd.....contrast that with John the Baptist's words here when asked who he was...I am not who you think that I am.

So who are you John?

What can we say about you?

It's testimony time and John raises his hand so to speak...and John quotes the OT prophet Isaiah...

*I am the voice of one calling in the desert, make straight the way for the Lord....*

Immediately, John turns the attention from himself to Jesus. Therein lies a valuable lesson for us all from John the Baptist.

John did not speak about himself but turned their attention away from himself. He didn't want them to look at his outward appearance, he only wanted them to hear the voice, because John believed that he was speaking the words of God. *"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."*

John realised that his calling was simply to prepare his people to meet Jesus. Jesus must increase, he said, while I decrease. So as important as John's function was, he was not centre stage. In other words, it was John's greatest calling and privilege to prepare the way for Jesus and then step back and allow Jesus to take centre stage.

As we prepare for the events of Easter, where Jesus takes centre stage, it's good for us to have the Baptist announce his coming again.

What does this teach us this morning?

Simply we are also called to point people to Jesus – to point away from ourselves and to simply be a voice, even if that is in the wilderness.

The point of John's reply is that it gives him no prominence whatsoever. He is no more than a faithful voice.

We are voices for God as well. We must be voices. We must speak of Jesus and declare His glory to the world. How else will people hear if his followers don't speak up for Him?

We must be bold voices for our Lord. We must be like the watchman on the wall blasting the trumpet and proclaiming the way of the Lord.

So, what is the message that the world needs to hear? Well lets hear from John again.

### **John 1 v29-34**

*Jesus is the Lamb of God*

<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God!”*

Here is the first thing that John wants us to know about Jesus.

We started this series of sermons eight weeks ago with Abraham and we remember the account of Abraham and the would-be sacrifice of his son Isaac? God had taken Abraham’s past away, as He called him to leave his homeland, and now to see if Abraham fully trusted Him, he was about to take his future as well, Isaac the son of promise, Abraham’s son, his only son.

I want to offer this suggestion to you and that is that when John the Baptist introduces Jesus as the Lamb of God, he answers Isaac’s age old question, *where is the Lamb?!!*

You see for the most part that question had been ringing throughout the OT... *where is the Lamb? Where is the Lamb?*

Now, we don’t want to gloss over too quickly Abraham’s response to his son’s question... *“God will provide for himself the lamb.”*

John’s words...

<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God”*

Literally, in the original Greek the word order is different. It should read, *Behold the Lamb that God provides, Himself.*

We also think back to the Passover in Egypt when God told Moses to have His people kill a lamb and paint its blood of their doorposts and lintels and when the death angel comes he will Passover their house and death will not enter.

So John the Baptist is pointing his people towards something profound. That Christ is the lamb of God – the sacrifice that the nation waited for. One who could take away their sin.

Isaiah the Prophet understood that in order for sin to be removed, and not just covered, there would have to be a special lamb, One God, himself would provide...

**Isaiah 53:3-7 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men;  
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,

and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he opened not his mouth.

*Behold the Lamb of God...*

Jesus is the Lamb of God, therefore, if sin is to be removed it must be by His sacrifice. There is no one else, no other name given to men by which we can be saved.

John proclaimed that Jesus would take away the sin of the world! Notice he speaks of the world and not just of the Jewish nation. This is a message that extends to all people of all time and it's a message that needs a response.

How do we respond to this sacrifice of God?

Well, later in John's gospel...Jesus announces that *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."*

There is the response to believe in Christ and to believe and trust in him as the lamb of God who has taken away the son of the world.

John points us to Christ, and he points with uncompromising words when he challenges his hearers to repent and to believe.

In Matthew's gospel, chapter 3v11, *I baptise you with water for repentance, But after me comes one more powerful than I. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

John's message is for the people to repent of their sinful living and be baptised. Christ came to begin a baptism of fire in the hearts of his followers and all who believe in him will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.

So this morning John challenges us to turn away from all selfish interest, from pride and from all that separates us from God's love, and to see afresh the lamb of God, who has taken away our sin, once and for all.

Next week is Palm Sunday and the spotlight falls on Jesus entering Jerusalem. John wants us to look in the direction of Jesus and to follow him. So, from the voice of John the Baptist, let us again hear him afresh as he says,

*"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."*