

Book of John #2

John 1:19-34

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Last week, Eric told us the Gospel of John is like an Oscar-winning drama. With that introduction, I want you to picture a dark screen and a light turns on and you see a man looking at the light.

John 1-6-8

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. **8** He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light”

Today we are talking about *John the Baptist*, not to be confused with the John who wrote this Gospel.

Before we talk more about this, let's talk about a movie in 2008 (15 years ago!) that I enjoyed called “Ironman” which not an Oscar winning drama but a good superhero movie. At the end of Ironman is a scene *after the credits* that was easy to miss because people left. But even if you saw it, you might not understand it *unless you like Ironman comic books* because it was a scene with a mysterious man that symbolizes what was to come. This is like John the Baptist: he was *recognizable only to those who had read the Law*...and they knew (or should have known) what would come next.

If you were going to pick a gospel during Advent, surely you would read Luke or Matthew because they have the birth story. BUT, consider that John the Baptist was in ALL FOUR Gospels!

Some questions to answer today:

Who did they think John was?

John 1:19 Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. **20** He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

1. First, they expected the **Messiah:** the one true king from the house of David.

This is the Old Testament where God promised David that his offspring would rule forever. We can find this in three places:

II Samuel 7:13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Psalms 132:12 If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever."

Psalms 89:3 You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.'

They asked John this question and he said he wasn't.

2. Next, they thought John might be **Elijah:**

John 1:21a "They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, "I am not."

Elijah, a prophet, was given an assistant named Elisha. One day, Elijah is taken away in a chariot of fire. In Malachi 4, we read the last verses in the Old Testament:

Malachi 4:6 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."

Before the great day of the Lord, Elijah was to return. So they wondered if John was Elijah, the one who must come before.

And John says he is not.

3. Next, they ask him if he is the **Prophet,** the one **like Moses.** When God's people were in the desert, the Glory of the Lord rested on their tent.

Deuteronomy 18:15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

They needed someone to be a mediator and Moses did this. When he met God, his face would shine and the people were terrified. Therefore, they wondered if John was the mediator.

John 1:21b “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.”

At this point, the people are clearly confused.

It is important to note here that there is a moment later in John when John, the writer of the Gospel, James and Peter go up the mountain with Jesus and witness the transfiguration of Jesus with Eijah and Moses. Together they witnessed these three and when they came down from the mountain and were talking.

Matt 17: 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. **3** Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. **4** Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

Why do they say Elijah must come before John the Baptist? What? This is not explained; John is beheaded.

Who did John think he was?

The Jewish leaders thought John was wither Elijah, Moses, or the Messiah. Jesus says he is Elijah.

John 1:22-18

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 the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” **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?”

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.”

28 This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

They keep trying to give John a *title* but he says he is a **VOICE**...repeatedly, he points away from himself and towards Jesus. He says he is not even worthy enough to untie Jesus's sandals.

This is at the beginning of a beautiful prophecy about Jesus in the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 40:3-8

3 A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

6 A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

7 The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

This is the voice calling in the wilderness to make a straight path before the Lord: he declares that God's glory would be revealed in the one coming. The Jewish leaders knew this passage when John quoted this.

Who did he think Jesus was?

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, 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."

Even before this, look back at Isaiah 40:6 where it says, *all men are like grass*. The Word was made flesh stands forever: such a contrast.

John says Jesus was like a lamb of God, greater than him because he was before him. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and is God's chosen one, the Messiah. He was baptizing in the Jordan River and Jesus came along and he baptized him. John tells us he saw the Spirit come on Jesus when this happened. He says Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away sin. If you are looking for Christ, this is He. *He testifies to the LIGHT and points to Jesus*. He wants people to look at Jesus, not him.

What does this have to do with Advent?

Two invitations are found:

1. John points to Jesus, away from himself. This is humble: he rejects titles and points to the light. When we talked about praise several weeks ago, we learned it was *shining the light on what is worthy*: Jesus is the one we should be looking at.

Do this in Advent: take the stories in Luke about Jesus's birth and reflect on them and **point to Jesus**.

2. Have our reality shaped by Jesus. The Jewish people thought they knew what would happen but they didn't. The invitation is to look back to Jesus, the one whom the promises are fulfilled. **Our reality and our identity are in relationship to Jesus**: we are his children, priests with a role to play; we stand alongside and have our reality shaped by Jesus.