

Stirred Up to Follow Christ

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[0 : 0 0] If you could turn in your Bibles to that reading from John chapter 1 on page 88. You'll notice that we are taking a short break of one week from the Acts preaching series we're doing, and this will resume next week.

This is the Sunday before Advent. It all starts next week. Commonly known as Stir Up Sunday. Partly from the colic which you heard read to you, Stir Up, O Lord.

And also because I understand on this Sunday, this is the day you're supposed to put your Christmas puddings on in preparation for the feast. So I hope there's a lot of stirring going on at home.

And as we start looking ahead to Advent, into that wonderful season and beyond to the great cataclysm that is Christmas, the reading today centers us and focuses us where we need to be.

The reading offers us Jesus Christ. And what we are invited to do is to see who He is. To understand who He is.

[1 : 0 6] To receive Him. A lot of people in the church these days get into great discussions about who Jesus is, what His significance is, how He operates.

And it can get very confusing. It can seem that Jesus changes as much as society changes. It can seem like Jesus has no authority beyond what the church says about Him, what church leaders say or churches and denominations decide to do.

What are we to believe about Him? How are we to understand Jesus? And it is into our lives right now, into our church right now, into our society right now, that this passage offers us Jesus.

And we are invited simply to receive Him. I want to look at this passage. I've got three statements. There are three statements about Jesus I want to highlight for you.

The first is from verse 36. Behold the Lamb of God. Second is from verse 41. We have found the Messiah. And third, from verse 45.

[2 : 1 5] The one Moses wrote about. I'm sorry I couldn't make them alliterate. I stayed up for hours trying to come up with three points that alliterated, but no success. So the first is, Behold the Lamb of God.

It's verse 35 and following. The next day again, John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked and said, Behold the Lamb of God. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And what John the Baptist is doing here is pointing the finger at Jesus in a way that would have been clear to his hearers. This is the one. This is the sacrifice.

And so we have the purpose clause of Jesus right from the start. He is the Passover Lamb. And now to his audience, this would have been quite a clear reference back to the Old Testament, to Exodus 12, remember the Passover night, and to Isaiah 53, the suffering servant.

The Passover. It was the night when Israel was delivered from the judgment brought upon all the firstborn males in Egypt. The Passover Lamb was a substitution, a substitutionary sacrifice, which averted the judgment of God from his people, so that the destroyer passed over the houses of the people of Israel, and they were delivered from Pharaoh.

[3 : 43] And it refers to Isaiah 53, that marvelous passage. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. He was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. And by his wounds we are healed. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. The servant in Isaiah 53 described as dying an atoning death like a lamb.

His death is a guilt offering. He takes the punishment on behalf of guilty sinners in order to deal with the problem of sin. His death brings peace between guilty sinners and a holy God.

It brings healing from sin. Removal of sin. And it is the highest expression of love that God could ever show us. It is the most loving thing he could do.

[4 : 45] But Jesus is identified by the Baptists as the one who will deal once and for all with the problem of sin. Let that be quite clear to you.

Jesus is identified by the Baptists as the one who will deal once and for all with the problem of sin. Jesus is not identified as a great moral teacher come to point the way to God.

Jesus is not identified as one brought to bring social justice. He is not identified as the one come to extend God's extravagant love to the human race.

Jesus is identified as the one who will deal with the problem of sin. The one who will offer a substitute. A substitutionary sacrifice.

Dying on behalf of sinful humanity. It's behold the Lamb of God. This is what he will do. This is who he is. I was recently at a conference with other pastors and church workers.

[5 : 52] And a fellow sitting at our table began to talk about the struggle to evangelize in Vancouver today. And he said, you know, I think what we have to do is just define the gospel.

Then we will be more effective. We've got to define what it means. What is the gospel? I've got to say I was somewhat confused by that statement. I don't know what he meant by defining the gospel.

Perhaps he thought as many do that we have to make the gospel more relevant to today. Or find ways of expressing a gospel that is attractive for people today. But over and against the changes of human trends and history stands the unchanging good news of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Over and against fad and fashion towers Jesus Christ. With his uncomfortable and disturbing message. You have a problem with sin that needs resolution. I have come to resolve it on your behalf.

And people will say, oh well, we don't really believe in that anymore, do we? People are essentially good and God loves them the way he created them. And all we have to do is communicate God's love to them.

[7 : 03] We've got to make the circle wider and wider. We don't believe that people are inherently sinful. And the idea that Jesus offered a sacrifice on my behalf. How preposterous.

How ridiculous. This day and age. A retired bishop of this diocese recently wrote this. He said, Jesus preached a message of love and radical inclusivity.

That is why he was crucified. Now that is a common view in many parts of the church. That Jesus challenged the status quo. And so the powers of conservatism had him killed.

But that is not the Messiah Jesus is. Because if Jesus died on the cross, simply because he challenged the powers of conservatism, it would mean that his death was an accident.

Something that happened to him. It would mean that the center of Jesus' purpose was somewhere else. His intention was not to die. That is not the Messiah Jesus came to be.

[8 : 07] That death on the cross is the purpose of Jesus' ministry here on earth. You cannot separate Jesus from his self-sacrifice on the cross. That death on the cross was offered on behalf of all of us.

So that by his wounds we might be healed. That all of our sin might be put upon him. And we might know forgiveness. That is the one need Jesus came to meet for you.

He did not come to affirm us. He did not come to accept us. He did not come to be a spiritual leader for us to follow. He came to offer the one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

And while we may want to try and figure out what the gospel is for today, we may want to find ways of making the gospel more relevant for today.

We may struggle to find ways to talk about the gospel in our society. All the while, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Lamb of God, towers above us with a message and an offer that has never changed.

[9 : 13] And what we are asked to do is cast our attention onto him. And behold the Lamb of God. Behold the Lamb of God. The second, we have found the Messiah.

And here we get into something different. This is relational. This is about relationship with Jesus. Jesus says to them, what do you want? They replied, Rabbi, where are you staying? Jesus replies, come and you will see.

God's drawing work. Do you see that the disciples are being drawn in by Jesus? We may not realize that, but God does that in us.

When we awaken to an emptiness inside ourselves. When you recognize a hunger inside of yourself, a stirring that is drawing you to think about religious things, to investigate church, to investigate Christianity.

That is God drawing you to his Son. And see how Jesus draws the disciples. It is Jesus reaching out and inviting them to come home and get to know him.

[10 : 21] Inviting them into relationship with him. And then look what follows. They meet Jesus. They get to know him. They go out and tell the others, look, we found the Messiah. Come and see.

It is Jesus drawing them in. And that continues today. Nothing has changed. Through his Spirit, Jesus draws you into relationship with him.

You are meant to have relationship with him. Augustine of Hippo said this, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee. And that is the restlessness that only Jesus can fill in all of us.

But not all of us listen. And most of us try to fill our lives in other ways. And that is why we are so busy all the time. Filling our lives with things other than our relationship with Jesus.

I have got some relatives who say they really will come. Come to our church sometime. Maybe the carol service. But you know, they are just so busy right now. Got to train for the Olympics in 2010. It is a long evangelistic process.

[11 : 27] But you see, all the while, Jesus is standing there and he says, Come, come. Now the disciples could have said, No, we are busy. We have got things to do. We are on the make.

But in verse 39, it says, So they went and saw where he was staying and spent that day with him. They went and spent time with Jesus. It is very simple. They experienced him.

They developed a relationship with him. Now this is presented to us as historical fact. It is part of the story. It is what happened. This is what they did. It is not a metaphor for the Christian faith.

It has happened. It is how they got to know Jesus. They developed a relationship with him. They responded to him. And out of that came that conviction. We have met the Messiah.

And that has not changed today. And this is not the same as getting to know about Jesus. This is getting to know Jesus. One of the ways we get to know Jesus is by cultivating a relationship with him.

[12 : 29] By accepting his invitation to be friends with him. To spend time with him. Jesus is alive. He is real. And we can have a relationship with him every day.

We can walk with him through our lives today. Now of course we do not have Jesus physically with us. Because he has ascended back to heaven. But he has given us the Holy Spirit. And when you become a Christian you receive the Holy Spirit.

And through the Holy Spirit of Jesus resident in you. That you can cultivate your relationship with him. But you have got to spend time with him. You have got to develop your relationship with Jesus.

And that happens when you spend time with him. In prayer. In worship. When you walk through your life with Jesus. Praying. Talking to him. Spending time with him.

You know one of the ways in which your faith can grow stale. Or in which you can miss out. On all the richness that Christianity offers you. Is to miss out on your relationship with Jesus.

[13 : 30] Now you have got to know who Jesus is. Absolutely. The Lamb of God. And you have got to build up your knowledge about Jesus. By studying the Bible. It is crucial. But you also have to cultivate your relationship with him.

And that relational part of your faith may be missing. In my own life I usually find. I mean it is an occupational hazard. I do find myself talking about Jesus quite a lot.

And always I find myself studying the Bible. In preparation for a study or something. But you know it is spending that time with Jesus. Growing in my relationship with him.

That gets lost. And when that happens. It is like the light dims in my life. Ever so gradually I start living out of my own resources. And my own strength.

My own understanding. And so my relationship with Jesus. Becomes head knowledge about him. But like the disciples.

[14 : 31] I need to spend time with Jesus. I need to develop a relationship with him. I need to respond to that call. Come. Come. And if you have never done so. I want to challenge you right now.

To put this to the test. Because the passage shows Jesus. Inviting the disciples. To come and get to know him. And they accept. It is the same today. It is no different. What you have to do is in your heart.

Accept that invitation. Cultivate a relationship with Jesus. Put it to the test. Start spending time with him in prayer. In worship.

And study. And walk with Jesus through your day. With your hands outstretched. Lord, I want to get to know you better. Come. Draw near to me. Refresh me.

Receive what Jesus wants to give you. And he will meet you more than half way. Because Jesus is alive. And we are meant to have a relationship with him.

[15 : 31] And if you are a mature Christian. You may need to examine again. Your relationship with Jesus. Do you continue to experience. A close and intimate walk with him. Or has it grown stale?

Is your faith being reduced. To a head knowledge about Jesus. Maybe you need to get back on your knees. And reignite your love for Jesus. Your relationship with him.

Because one of the things we see in the Gospels. Is that just knowing the Bible. Does not lead to faith in Jesus Christ. The Pharisees knew their scriptures. They knew them in and out. Yet they were blind to Jesus.

Jesus is alive. And wants us to have a relationship with him. And when you answer that call. Come. And you spend that time with him.

Then like the disciples. You will be able to say. We have found the Messiah. But finally. The one who Moses wrote about. And I think this is critical.

[16 : 30] Look at what's happening with me at the text. First. John the Baptist points the finger at Jesus. And identifies him as the Lamb of God. Then the disciples approach Jesus.

And they go home with him. They begin this relationship with him. And come to this conviction. We have found the Messiah. But there is a further understanding of who Jesus is. Which the disciples come to.

And what they realize. Is that Jesus of Nazareth. Is the Messiah promised in scripture. Now they have the Old Testament. And they understood that the Messiah promised there.

And Jesus of Nazareth. Are the same. Verse 44. Philip like Andrew and Peter. Was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael.

And told him. We have found the one Moses wrote about. In the law. And about whom the prophets also wrote. Jesus of Nazareth. The son of Joseph. Now you can hardly imagine.

[17 : 26] Two more contradictory statements here. This person we have met. Is Jesus of Nazareth. The son of Joseph. A local boy. We know him. We grew up with him. Yet he is also the one Moses wrote about.

The one whom the prophets wrote about. Jesus is rooted in scripture. He stands towering above the here and now of our lives. And is nothing less than the fulfillment.

Of God's great plan for the salvation of the human race. Now clearly. The disciples came to this understanding. Because Jesus taught them. What else was he doing.

When they went home with him. Presumably they did more. Than have a beer together. And we know from the gospels. That this is a fundamental part. Of Jesus teaching about himself.

In John 5. Jesus talks about testimonies. Which point to him. And he includes. John the Baptist. His own miracles. And the scriptures. He says.

[18 : 20] These are the scriptures. Which testify. About me. And twice at the end of Luke's gospel. Jesus teaches the disciples. That he is to be found in the scriptures.

On the road to Emmaus story. In chapter 24 of Luke. Jesus says. How foolish you are. And how slow of heart to believe. All that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things.

And then enter into his glory. And a little bit later. In chapter 24. He says. This is what I told you. While I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled.

That is written about me. In the law of Moses. The prophets. And the Psalms. Then he opened their minds. So that they could understand. The scriptures. Notice it's the law of Moses.

The prophets. And the Psalms. And what this means is. That Jesus is not just. Written into scriptures. He is plowed into them. And the unambiguous message.

[19 : 19] Of the scriptures. Is that the Messiah. Would suffer and die. A substitutionary death. On behalf of sinful humanity. And it is Jesus.

Who opens our minds. To understand the scriptures. And we have an unambiguous witness. To Jesus in the scriptures. It is Jesus himself.

Who has shown us how to read them. That is what gives scriptures. Its authority. He has provided the interpretation. Now conservative Christians like us.

Have been accused of treating the Bible. Like a divine fax machine. Getting messages direct from God. That is not what we do. But you can read the Bible.

In any number of different ways. And get very different answers from it. Which is why it is so important. And so wonderful. And reassuring. That Jesus has provided the framework.

[20 : 14] Within which we read and understand the Bible. And I think this really is quite important. Because experience of Jesus. Can be highly subjective.

I know in my own life. That I feel very close to Jesus some days. And other times I feel far away. When our children were babies. And we got no sleep. I felt very far away from Jesus.

And I discovered new depths of sin and grumpiness in my heart. Sometimes my life goes well. And I feel close to Jesus. Other times trouble comes. And I grumble. And wonder where he is.

You see it can be a bit flimsy. Relationship and experience of Jesus on its own. Can provide a flimsy foundation for a mature Christian faith. On the other hand.

Voices in society can call the church in many different directions. Voices in society can call the church. To demand justice for one group one day.

[21 : 11] Another group the next day. Society can tell us that our beliefs are unacceptable or old fashioned. And the statistics are that while a large percentage of Canadians believe in God.

Most of whom we live in Saskatchewan. Fewer and fewer express that by going to traditional church. And the temptation can be there to alter the gospel.

In a way. And in a manner that fits better into our society. That is more acceptable. That over and against that stands the biblical witness of who Jesus is.

And the need he came to fulfill. Behold the Lamb of God. We have found the Messiah. He is the one who Moses and the prophets and the Psalms spoke about. Which means that I need to check my experience of Jesus against the biblical witness of Jesus.

We need to check the choices and decisions we make as church against the biblical witness of Jesus. Because the biblical message about Jesus stands towering above human frailty and change.

[22 : 16] It is an unchanging rock against which the tides of human fashion can rise and fall. Yet the Bible remains with its clarion call to faith in Jesus Christ.

We can say what we like and do as we will as a church. But the biblical witness to Jesus remains and does not change. Behold the Lamb.

We have found the Messiah. He is the one Moses wrote about. We are called to do nothing more and nothing less than to cast the eyes of our hearts on Jesus Christ.

To put Jesus at the center of our lives and of our church. Jesus. Jesus. Center stage. He is there. He is unchanging.

He is everlasting. And he is love. Amen.