

John 1 v 19

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[0 : 00] I'll just turn again to the chapter we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 1. I want us to look at the section from verse 19 through to verse 34.

Last week we looked at the first 18 verses again just by way of overview. I'm not going to read it, but just at the beginning. And this is a testimony of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you?

Now it's a great thing to have a testimony. And I suppose it's one of the reasons why testimony meetings are always very popular, because we always like to hear how the Lord worked in a person's heart.

Of course, God works in very different ways. Some people we know, some people will actually look back, and they can never really point to a place or a time when they didn't love the Lord Jesus.

And we believe that the Lord will sometimes work with people, even as they did with John the Baptist, where John the Baptist was separated to the Lord, even in the womb.

[1 : 20] Again, some people are drawn to the Lord very gently. And it might be gradually over a period of time, but they're able to say, just like the blind man, I don't know what happened.

But the one thing I do know is that before, that now I see. I was blind, but now I see. Where there's a growing realization, a growing understanding, a growing love in the heart to and for Jesus.

So, a person cannot put any mark, cannot say, well, I was converted at such and such a time, but the one thing I do know is that now I love the Lord.

For some people, it's very clear. Their conversion is very, it's very, very clear. They can pinpoint the day, the hour, even the very minute when they came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, a testimony is a great thing. And again, when we hear a person's testimony, we aren't to automatically think and say, oh, well, I can't follow any of that. I can't be a Christian.

[2 : 26] Because everybody's experiences, they're all different. And some people have, they have a life where God has preserved them and delivered them out of the most amazing things.

I will have to find out, because I remember hearing a man in Nescalam in the week, maybe some of you would remember him. I remember him years ago talking about, he was a very good presenter, but he was a prisoner of war with the Japanese, and he was lined up with others to be shot.

And I cannot remember how some of the group that were lined up to be shot were, but he wasn't. And I can't remember exactly what happened. But at that stage, what gripped my mind was not only the deliverance, but he had no thought even then of eternity.

It didn't register with him. And yet God was going to work powerfully in his heart and in his life. And that's why I'm saying some testimonies are incredibly graphic and dramatic.

Not many people would be able to share along these kind of things. And yet at the end of the day, what we've got to make sure of is that our testimony doesn't, we often tend to think of testimony as simply our coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

[3 : 54] But our testimony shouldn't stop there. If it does or something, we've got to learn to move on. Testimony is ongoing, testifying to God's grace, to the way that he works within our life through the dark experiences and through the bright experiences, to the things that we learn, to the things that have molded us and brought us and made us to what we are now.

And these are the sort of things that we ought to be sharing in and sharing us by way of testimony. So here is John the Baptist. And we find the heading given to us here that this is the testimony of John.

Now, we're told here that, I mean, there's various things that we can see, that John, as he bears testimony, and I think it's a very important thing if we are ever asked to give our testimony, is that John's testimony was not, although he had to give to a certain extent a testimony about himself because they were asking about himself, he was seeking to testify to Jesus.

And any time that we share in the gospel or have to give any word of testimony, let us make sure that that's what we're seeking to do, not exalt ourselves, but to exalt Christ.

And that was one of the great things about John the Baptist. It was a very hearted, it was almost like his heart was ticking with this desire to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 31] Now, John, of course, had been given a special message and a special mission. And it was a message and a mission of preparation, preparation for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And his ministry was largely a ministry of repentance. And this was all part of the preparation for Jesus Christ.

And I think there's a huge lesson there for the church to learn because the church often prays for God to pour out blessing. And we all do.

And there isn't a believer who doesn't long for revival. And we'd say, Lord, oh, come in reviving power. Lord, pour out your blessing. But you'll notice that before Jesus began his public ministry, or at the very outset of it, as the way was being prepared for him, that the preparation was a ministry of repentance.

And I think there's a lot for us to learn there. Because, you see, we have to be prepared for God to bless us. We need that. And one of the glaring faults, I believe, is our inability to understand and to realize the depth and the ugliness and the depravity and the awfulness of sin in the sight of God.

[7 : 01] Because we often treat sin lightly. You do. I do. Because we're sinners and because we live with it, we become often complacent and used to it.

And we say, well, that's just the way I am. Yes, it is. But God is looking for far more than a glib, I'm sorry.

It's not enough just to say to the Lord, Lord, I'm sorry, and then just carry on as we did before. That's not repentance. That's, these are just cheap words.

It's very easy to say, I'm sorry, and just carry on as before. If we do, it's showing that we aren't really sorry. To be sorry for sin is where our heart is sore.

Because we realize that we have offended the living and true God, the God we love. And the more that we see, it was like when I was talking to the young people, the more that we see of the Lord and see who He is, the more we will understand just how offensive sin is.

[8 : 13] You know, David was such a good man, and he lived so close to the Lord. But you remember after his time of, after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and he had Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, murdered in order to try and cover his tracks.

David lived quite some time, and he would have gone through all the rituals, and he would never have stopped worshipping God. But he lost sight of the holiness of God, and he lost sight of the ugliness of sin.

And he didn't realize just how far he had fallen, until Nathan the prophet came to him and pointed the finger directly at him. He said, you're that man, after he told that story that really just touched David's heart.

He said, you're that man. You think, just realize what you did. And when we go to Psalm 51, we see there just how David discovered what sin was.

David couldn't have written Psalm 51 a month before that. But when he wrote that psalm, his heart was bleeding. It was broken. But it wasn't broken in despair.

[9 : 31] It was broken in love. And of course, it was in love that he was making his way back to God. And that's what we need to do. That's what we need to have this heart. This heart of repentance.

And you know, we can't work up repentance ourselves. We can't just make it happen. In the same way that we can't make faith happen. Faith is God-given.

And my friend, if you're today without Jesus Christ here, can I ask you to go to the Lord and say, Lord, please give me faith to believe. Give me that faith to believe in you.

And in the same way, we need to go to the Lord and ask him for a spirit of repentance. We're told that in the Bible that the Lord will pour out that spirit of repentance into his people.

And that's what we need. We need that to be moved in our heart by the Lord so that we will genuinely, sincerely grieve over our sin.

[10 : 32] And that, my friends, is the pathway to blessing. Now, we see here that John bears testimony to himself at the very beginning.

And he does that, of course, because this deputation has come from the Pharisees. And they're asking him, right, who are you? Because John hadn't gone through the normal schools, through the theological schools and the rabbinical schools.

He was this kind of free man. He was this man from the wilderness. He was this wild kind of character. And yet, there was no question but that God's power and presence and authority was on him.

And the religious leaders wanted to know. And rightly so. But they wanted to know, who are you? You're not an ordinary man. Your message is different.

There's an authority and a power with you. Who are you? So, you can understand it was a very genuine question, at least to a certain extent.

[11 : 31] They were asking, so they're asking, who are you? Are you the Christ? Are you Elijah? Are you the prophet? And to each one, John was saying no. Of course, he was the Elijah-type character that the Bible had foretold would come before Jesus.

But John probably himself didn't recognize that at that particular time. So, they're saying, who are you? And John says very simply, quoting from Isaiah, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.

Make straight the way of the Lord. That is, as the prophet Isaiah said. I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.

And my friends, that's where you and I are today. We're in a wilderness. God made a garden. And he put man and woman in a garden.

And man and woman turned the garden into a wilderness. Because that was not the original design, the original creation that God made.

[12 : 45] God made a beautiful world. A beautiful garden. Everything was in harmony and beauty and peace. But we turned that garden into a wilderness.

And it has remained a wilderness ever since. Yes, this world is very beautiful in many ways. But it's a sore world. It's a sick world. It's a hard world.

It's a painful world. And there's not one of us in here but understands to a certain extent something of what it says here that it's a wilderness.

That's where we're at. Yes, we have good times. We have wonderful times. But it's still a wilderness. And just as the Israelites were taken from Egypt to the promised land, it was through the wilderness.

But it's in the wilderness that God was dealing with them. And it's here still in the wilderness that God is dealing with us. But you know the wonderful thing is that God is going to restore the garden.

[13 : 47] And that's where he's going to take us. He's going to take us back to the garden. To an even more beautiful garden. You remember the first time, and that's one of the wonderful things, that when we get to the eternal garden of glory, that you remember the first garden when Adam and Eve sinned.

They were put out of the garden. And there was an angel with a flaming sword there guarding the garden so that there was no way back in for them towards the tree of life.

Once out, they couldn't get back in. But you know it's going to be the very reverse? In the garden of glory. Because once in, we will never again be able to go out.

Forever and ever with the Lord. And it's a wonderful way that God in the end is going to take all the glory. He's going to recreate. He's going to make all things new.

More glorious and more wonderful than ever. And so the religious leaders were asking John, okay, why are you baptizing? Because they couldn't understand John baptizing in this way.

[15 : 00] They baptized, but it was in order to take people who weren't Jews, those who were wanting to embrace the Jewish faith. But John was baptizing Jews. And John, of course, was telling them that this was all part of the ministry that was given him.

And that it was going to be through his baptizing that the Messiah, the one who was coming after him, the one that he was talking about, was going to be revealed.

God had revealed to John that it was as he baptized that he would make Jesus known. And that's what we read there in verse 33.

I myself did not know him, but he who sent me, that's God who sent me to baptize with water, said to me, he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain.

This is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and I have borne witness that this is the Son of God. And so it was as John was baptizing Jesus that this remarkable thing happened.

[16 : 11] And John saw heaven open and he saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove appearing in this way descend upon Christ.

And, of course, John had great faith because as John preached and proclaimed and as he baptized, he was doing all this by faith.

He didn't, as we say, he didn't know exactly what was or who the person was. And so we see that he saw the Holy Spirit descending.

And the very idea I have here is it's like a dove hovering. As a dove comes down and kind of hovers before landing.

And when we read this in John, we go back again to Genesis. Because that's exactly what we're told in Genesis as well, back in Genesis chapter 1. We read of the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water.

[17 : 14] Exact same. Exact same. And there's this great link. We saw it last week between Genesis 1 and John chapter 1. And the dove, of course, it's very interesting how it's a dove.

It's in the form of a dove or in the appearance or in the manner of a dove. The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus. Because again, when you think of the dove, we go back to Genesis.

Genesis chapter 8. The flood. And as the floodwaters began to subside. Remember, Noah sent out. He sent out a raven and he sent out a dove.

And remember how the dove came back. The dove came back with an olive. An olive branch. An olive leaf in its mouth. Indicating that the waters were subsiding.

That once again, life was to be found. And again, we have this whole idea of the presence of the dove as God is renewing.

[18 : 15] And God is bringing life again through Noah into this world. And here we have the dove coming down again. Where there's this new time of new creation.

Recreating. And the Lord is at work. This is the beginning of what is to be where we are actually now. The dove, of course, speaks to us of gentleness.

Of tenderness. It's a picture of affection and gentleness. And that's a great picture of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit.

He's gentle. In fact, there are two expressions given in the Word of God about our duty to the Holy Spirit. We're told not to quench the Spirit.

And we're told not to grieve the Spirit. We have this idea of how sensitive the Holy Spirit is. And you and I know only too well how true that is.

[19 : 16] Is it not true that there have been times we've enjoyed blessing? You think. Think into your life. And you say there are periods where you feel so, so close to the Lord.

Everything is wonderful. And you're saying to yourself, I wouldn't change this for anything in the world. Your Christianity is so alive.

It is so vibrant. And Christ is so special. God is so close to you in the sense of being and presence. And then, bang. You lose all that.

It's not that you lose all that. But that closeness has gone. Can it just be by something you said? Or something you did?

And it's gone. Because the Holy Spirit is so, as it were, so sensitive. And that is why we're told to be careful that we do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

[20 : 19] And may I say to anybody in here today who's without Jesus Christ, if you are ever listening to the Word, and you feel yourself being drawn to the Word, it's like your heart going out.

And you're saying to yourself, this is for me. I'd like to be a Christian. And then, sometimes, you pull back.

And you say, no. No. Don't. Because you can grieve. That drawing of your heart, when your heart starts going out, when you're away, when you feel God is speaking to you, you feel that this Word is alive.

It's personal. This is for me. Don't put up a barrier. Don't draw back. Don't say, oh, think about this some other time. This is personal.

This is direct. This is for you. And it's so easy to grieve the Spirit and say, oh, no, no. Oh, no, no. Oh, this is, this is, I'll think, I'll do, I'll, no.

[21 : 26] I'll become more serious about this next Sunday. Or, I'll leave it at the end of the year. This is, oh, not just now. My friend, we can grieve the Spirit by doing that.

If you're being drawn, rather than pull back, say, Lord, I'm scared, but please, I need you. Come into my heart.

And then we have this great sense of John's humility here. Because as John is baptizing, and as he, obviously, there's, he's become the great center of attraction, as it were, round and about.

But John says very simply about this, this passion that, that is coming after him, this passion that he's speaking about. He says, this is he of whom I said after me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.

Now, that's quite extraordinary. Because John, John and Jesus remember our cousins. So, John knew Jesus as a, as a cousin.

[22 : 31] But he, at that earlier time, didn't know who he was, that he was the Messiah. But chronologically, age-wise, John was born before Jesus.

So, when John says, after me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. That, in a sense, is almost mysterious. Because John is saying, I'm older than this passion, but he actually is older than me.

Because he was always before me. And, of course, what John is doing here is, he is speaking about the, the Son of God. Because, as we saw last week, the Messiah, Christ, has no beginning.

He is eternal with the, with the Father. One, the Father, and Son are co-equal. So, that's really what, what John is saying there. But we also see this tremendous humility of John.

He, as John was to say later on, he must increase and I must decrease. My friend, do you know the great way to see Jesus?

[23 : 39] Is to see him in the way that John saw him. And John saw him through humble eyes. The greatest vision that God's people have is when they see their own nothingness and see the greatness and majesty of God.

Abraham got such a view of God as he was interceding for Lot. And he saw himself. Remember, he says, I said, Lord, as he carried on praying. He said, I am but dust and ashes.

That's how Abraham felt in the presence of God. I'm but dust and ashes. Isaiah, when he was given that vision of the Lord, he says, Oh, woe is me, for I am undone.

And we find likes of Job and these great people of God. It was in their humility. In their seeing the nothingness.

It's not a fault. Humility is not something where a person tries to be. If you try to be humble and make yourself look humble, you can be proud of that.

[24 : 43] That's not humility. Humility is not a cloak that you put on for people in order to try and make yourself look, I don't know how you try and make yourself look humble, but to try and make yourself, oh, I, and you know, this person can have the proudest heart and have the appearance of humility.

It's what we are in the presence of God. Sometimes people who may look, they may appear anything but humble, but actually they have very humble hearts. They see their own nothingness in the presence of God.

And their whole aim is to exalt the Lord, not themselves. It's not about remembrance of Christians. It's not about you. It's not about me. It's about Jesus.

And that's why John was such a remarkable man. You could almost, if he, John had wild clothing. He was the Elijah-like character. But it's almost as if, you know, today people have t-shirts and things written on them.

It would be, if John had a t-shirt, it would be, it's not about me, it's about Jesus. Because that's what he lived. That's how he lived. That was his whole motive, was to exalt Jesus.

[25 : 56] And that's why he was such a remarkable man. And so Jesus comes the next day and John sees him coming.

That's what we see in verse 29. And John makes this great declaration, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You know, if John never said anything else, If there was nothing else that John ever spoke, These would be amongst the greatest words ever spoken.

These words tell us everything about Jesus. And it says, remember, The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. There's many things we could say in conclusion, But just two very brief things here.

First of all, we see the scope. The scope, it's the world. The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Takes away sins of people in Stornoway, Seattle, Saigon, Sierra Leone, Doesn't matter, put all the S's, Put all the world.

All the different areas of this world. This is a Savior. It's the same Savior for all the different areas, The different colors, The different creeds, The different beliefs or non-beliefs.

[27 : 20] There is only one Savior. There is only one Lord, Jesus Christ. He is the Savior of the world. There is no other. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Which again speaks of the enormity or the extent of sin.

Every conceivable sin. That's what I love. It's not narrowing it down and saying, You know, Jesus Christ, He takes away sins of the world.

If I just said sins of the world, You might say to yourself, I wonder if these are the sins, My sins, Or are there any sins that He doesn't know?

It's the sin of the world. Every sin. So your sin is never too great for Jesus to deal with.

And that's who John saw. And he says, The Lamb of God. And of course, for the Jew, That was full of significance. The perfect Lamb. The sacrificial Lamb.

[28 : 27] The Lamb, remember, Which was at the very center of the great highlighted Passover feast, That they followed year by year, Remembering their great deliverance in Egypt, Where the Lamb was slain, And the blood poured out to save them.

All pointing to this Lamb. My friend, Are you today, Sheltering under the blood of this Lamb?

If not, You're out on your own, With nothing, Nothing to cover you, From the wrath of God.

But you know, If you shelter under the work of Jesus, Then God's wrath passes away. And He looks at you in love.

He looks at you through His Son. He looks at you with favor and with pleasure. He looks at you with delight. And He actually says, You are my possession in this world.

[29 : 35] It's not an extraordinary thing. You know, Many people have many possessions, And some possessions are more important than others. God is one possession in this world.

It's His people. That's what the Bible tells us. You today are His possession. You're His jewel. Because at the end of the day, That's what He says, On that day when I make up my jewels, I hope that every single one of us, Will be amongst His jewels.

Let us pray. O gracious God, We pray that we may indeed delight In all that the Word tells us.

That we may realize that God is speaking to us Personally and individually. And that this has been given for our soul's good. We live in a wilderness.

And there's so much to deaden our soul. So much to draw us away. So much that in this life we struggle with.

[30 : 48] And yet God has revealed Himself in Christ. Made Himself known to us. And so we pray that we may delight in the Lord. And that we may have faith in Him. Do us good, we pray. Take us to our home safely. Bless a cup of tea in the hall. And forgive us our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.