

John 1: 6-8, 19-34 Jesus: God's Anointed King

I want you to imagine for a moment that somehow you have ended up as a candidate on The Apprentice. You've managed to survive the opening few tasks and hopefully held onto some of your dignity and humility, but now Lord Sugar has asked you and your team to arrange the launch of a brand new product. But this is to be no ordinary task. This isn't the launch of a new hair care range or phone or the world's best pizza, this task is to launch the ministry of Jesus onto the world's stage.

Now I know that has already happened some 2000 years ago, but if it was to happen today and it was your job to put everything in place so that the ministry of Jesus got off to the best start: I wonder where you'd begin? No doubt there would be some market research done to work out the best location. Some kind of advertising campaign would need to be devised, a spokesman would have to be appointed and a series of follow-up events planned so that the message could continue to spread. These days no doubt there would also be novelty toys or pens printed with campaign slogans, not to mention making social media a priority with a viral video, a Facebook page, and as many tweets, pokes and Snap Chat comments as could be arranged. And certainly the launch event would have to stand out wouldn't it? Something would have to happen that would capture the imagination of the public so that the message and ministry of Jesus had a chance to take hold.

In John chapter 1 that's what we see happening as long before the age of billboards and digital marketing companies, God planned and put into practice the perfect launch programme for the saving mission of Jesus Christ.

And this was not just a few days or weeks in the planning; this had been God's plan since before the creation of the world. God knew that human beings would rebel against his rightful rule and he knew the perfect moment for the saviour to appear. The whole of the Old Testament heads towards this point but this is the moment when God's salvation plan for the whole world starts to take centre stage. All the fallible Old Testament Kings pointed to this moment when God's anointed King would appear. All the imperfect priests from across the ages, making sacrifices that could never fully atone for sin, pointed to this moment when God's perfect priest and final sacrifice would begin his walk to the cross. And in this moment, the journey the Israelites began hundreds of years before as they walked towards the Promised Land would draw to an end as the ministry of Jesus began to reveal the character of God's eternal kingdom where his people would ultimately find eternal rest, perfect peace and everlasting joy.

And the people were waiting. In fact, they had been waiting over 400 years for a prophet of God to appear and to announce this day. And that prophet was John the Baptist who came declaring the word of the Lord with the passion Elijah and the authority of Moses. And the people, hungry for hope and sensing the move of God in their midst came in their droves to see him.

Before we get to grips with the passage I think it would be useful to put this account into an historical context. John the Baptist had had a miraculous conception and an alcohol-free, Nazarite upbringing until at about 30 years of age he had appeared in the desert, dressed in camel's hair clothing and began preaching his message of repentance. His mission was to get people ready for the coming of God's Messiah. So he reminded people of the holiness of God, called them to repent of their sins and wickedness, and offered water baptism as a sign of their full repentance and a new start. As you might imagine, this created quite a stir. John was working not too far from Jerusalem, so crowds of people came to see him and he told them, time and time again, that he was not the Messiah but that the Messiah was coming and so they should get ready to receive him.

And one day whilst John was preaching Jesus came along. He walked up to John, who recognised him as the one he had been waiting for, and despite John's protests, Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan. You can read about that in Mark chapter 1. But Jesus' ministry didn't begin straightaway. The Gospels tell us that Jesus then went into the desert for 40 days of prayer and fasting and to be tempted by the devil.

During those 40 days John continued his preaching; only now events had moved on. News of John's work had reached the hierarchy in Jerusalem and the Jewish leaders, (that's who the gospel writer refers to as the Jews of Jerusalem in verse 19), sent priests, Levites and Pharisees to question John about his work. They wanted to know who John really was.

I have to say that their questioning method leaves much to be desired. If you've ever played 20 questions with a young child you'll know that kids don't use their questions in the right way. They make wild guesses all the time rather than narrowing down the field with carefully constructed yes or no questions. And it's the same with these Jewish leaders. They ask John if he is Elijah and John says no. They ask him if he is the prophet and again John says he isn't.

Why these two questions? Well in Malachi chapter 4 Malachi says that God would send the prophet Elijah before the coming of the Lord in judgment, and in Deuteronomy 18 Moses says that God would send a prophet like Moses to lead the people - that's why they have come up with these two guesses. But whilst they might be close, they haven't hit the jackpot. So they asked him out right in verse 22 *"who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"*

And like many a prophet before him, John gives a rather enigmatic answer, but it's an answer which makes it perfectly clear his relative importance in the grand scheme of things. In verse 23 John says that he is *"the voice of one calling in the desert, 'make straight the way for the Lord.'"* John knows he's not the real thing. He is the warm-up act, the forerunner, the publicist, the spokesman, the road sign: he is there to point people to Jesus and nothing more. And as you read through the passage you see the relative power that each has don't you. John baptised with water for an outward sign, but Jesus baptised with the Spirit of God who transforms from the inside out. John washed people with water to symbolise the forgiveness of sins but Jesus came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. John may be worthy of attention; a rising star on the religious stage, but compared to Jesus he wasn't worthy to bow down and undo the straps of Jesus' sandals. Sometimes spokesmen and women for famous companies or individuals end up being stars themselves. But that was never John's aim. His job was to point people to Jesus.

And after months of pointing towards Jesus with his words, John finally gets to point to him with his hand. That's where verse 29 picks up. *"The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"* Whilst John is calling people to get ready for Jesus, Jesus appears and John says "that's him! He's the one I've been talking about!" That would have been an incredible moment wouldn't it, and all the more so when we realise just who it was standing in their midst.

And what I want to do for the next few minutes is to give you six things that we find out about Jesus in this passage, before leaving us all with a final challenge.

1: Jesus is the long awaited King (v23)

We see that in verse 23, as John points his questioners to the prophecies from Isaiah some 600 years before, but we can also see it in the questions the priest and the Levite asked. The coming of God's promised rescuing King had been on the agenda for centuries and the people were worn out with waiting.

Waiting was part of the history of God's Old Testament people. The prophets all pointed to this day and people in each age and generation had lived for it and hoped for it and waited for it with expectant hearts, but time and time again their hopes were unfulfilled. Perhaps it is easy for us looking back to forget how hard it would have been to keep trusting and keep hoping through the times of exile and rebuilding and persecution but that's what God's people did. They somehow held on and kept hoping and kept waiting and kept praying for the day when God's anointed King would come and rescue his people.

If you know couples who have struggled to conceive and who have gone through the pain of several unsuccessful rounds of IVF treatment, then perhaps you will appreciate the emotional highs and lows God's people had gone through as they waited and longed for the promised Messiah. Now put yourself in a place where a child had finally been conceived, and where the pregnancy had been hard and difficult and where there were complications at the point of giving birth when suddenly the doctor comes out of the delivery room with a huge smile. That's a fraction of the level of relief and joy that many in Jesus' day felt now that the long, long, long wait was over. Jesus is the long-awaited King and he had finally come.

2: Jesus is the most important King (v27)

Unlike the prophets and priests and even kings of previous generations, the one John the Baptist pointed to was of utmost importance. No prophet, no priest, and no King could compare to him. Jesus says of John the Baptist that amongst those of natural birth none were greater than he, and yet what does John the Baptist say about Jesus? He says he is not great enough even to serve Jesus by taking off his shoes.

There was a saying at the time of Jesus that students would do anything for their teachers except take off their shoes. That was a job for the most menial of slave or servant. And yet John the Baptist says here that compared to Jesus even he, whom Jesus called the greatest of human beings, is too lowly to serve Jesus in that way.

I think often we concentrate so much on the humanity of Jesus that we forget just who he is. We concentrate on the first half of Philippians chapter 2 and how Jesus emptied himself of all his glory and might, but we forget that it was of that divine glory and might that he had to empty himself to become a man. We forget too that right now Jesus is back where he began "*exalted (to the) highest place and given a name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" Don't lose sight of who it is John the Baptist points to. Jesus is the most important King.

3: Jesus is the ageless king (v30)

There are many times in the Gospels when the divinity of Christ is seen in the text and this is one. But you've got to know what you're looking for.

You see this was a culture where elders were respected and where being born first brought rank and privilege. So in human terms John was of greater importance than Jesus because he was born earlier, even if it was only by about six months. But in verse 30 John suggests that Jesus came before him!

How? Because Jesus is the ageless king. Colossians chapter 2 verse 17 says this of Jesus: "*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*" Notice this isn't Jesus just being before John, this is Jesus being before everything, because Jesus has eternally existed with the Father. To put it another way, there was never a time when he was not. So Jesus isn't simply a long-awaited human rescuer, even one with great

might in power and majesty, he is the second person of the Trinity, God become man to dwell among us. Jesus is the ageless king.

4: Jesus is the true and universal King (v9)

To see this spelled out we have to go back to verse 9 but it's implicit in what we have already seen about Jesus' deity, power and authority. But in verse 9 the apostle John makes this stunning claim about Jesus absolutely clear. This is what he says about him: *"the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world."*

Perhaps the thing about the Christian faith which riles the most people in our society it is this claim to the absolute truth and universal authority of Jesus. Today truth has become relative: something can be true for you, even if it is contradicted by evidence or common sense. In fact many people today seem to be able to imagine that a whole series of completely contradictory truths can all be absolutely true.

You may have heard of the illustration of all religions travelling up the same mountain towards the same God, albeit by completely different routes. But that simply cannot be the case. The God of the Bible is completely different from the God of the Koran. Hindus believe in many gods and Buddhists don't really believe in god in the same sense as Christians or Muslims or Hindus would use that word. What's more different religions have different versions of history: The Bible says Jesus was both fully God and fully man at the same time and that he died physically on the cross before being buried and rising on the third day. Islam says that is a lie from start to finish and so Islam and the Bible both can't be true! Ultimately there can be only one truth and the apostle John makes it clear that it is Jesus. He is the one true light who, by his life and teaching, brings light to every man.

And if Jesus is the world's one true light, then he is also the world's universal King. Our western liberal way of thinking might be happy to leave North Africa in the grip of Islam and leave India following the path of Hinduism, as we might feel content to leave our neighbours following a different religion to ours, but if we believe the Scriptures these nations and people are following false gods and need to be told of Jesus the true light and universal King. All the world is his kingdom and all people need to bow the knee to him for he alone is the truth and the light of the world. The great missionary hymn puts it this way: *"Jesus shall reign where're the sun does his successive journeys run. His kingdoms stretch from shore to shore till moons shall wax and wane no more."* Jesus is the true and universal King. That is who John points to on the banks of the Jordan River.

5: Jesus is the redeeming King (v29)

In the time of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I monarchs used to go on great processions up and down the country taking with them huge numbers of servants. They would stop in the house of a friendly Lord and enjoy their hospitality for a while, often almost bankrupting them in the process, before moving on. But even though all the world is his, Jesus doesn't come to earth to take from his subjects, Jesus comes to give and to give his life as a ransom for many.

That's what John is talking about in verse 29 when he points to Jesus and says *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* This long-awaited, ageless, most important, true and universal King is also our redeeming King. In a few minutes, as we share in bread and wine together, we will celebrate the truth that on the cross our sin was laid on him and by his stripes we are healed.

Just a couple of weeks ago we marked Remembrance Sunday, bringing to mind all those who gave their lives for King and country. But at this point in history it is the King who gives his life for his people. Not that we were friendly people either. The Bible tells us that in our natural human state we are enemies of God, rebels against his rightful rule, thieves of his glory, and profaners of his words. And yet Jesus came to redeem and free people like us both from slavery to sin and the penalty of sin. That was his mission. This Jesus is the redeeming King.

6: Jesus is the Spirit-anointing King (v33)

In verse 32 John the Baptist said that he recognised Jesus when the Spirit of God descended on him like a dove and remained on him during his baptism. Not that Jesus needed an anointing with the Spirit; he was already full of the Spirit from birth, as he had been from all eternity.

But in redeeming people for himself Jesus wants more than saved sinners; he wants a transformed and holy people who will reflect his glory to the world and by their lives bring praise and honour to his name. And whilst the water of baptism is a wonderful sign of the inward reality of faith and of the washing away from the guilt and sin of our fallen human nature that is ours by faith in Christ, it is the Spirit of God within who transforms and brings life and healing and hope and purpose. It is the Spirit of God within us that grows in us the fruits of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. It is the Spirit of God within us who is the deposit, guaranteeing the greater glory of what is to come.

On our own we cannot change. On our own we cannot grow in holiness. On our own we will fall away. But with the Spirit within us God cannot only transform us, but through us point others to the transforming love and power of Christ. Jesus is the Spirit-anointing King whom the Old Testament prophets pointed to when they spoke of God transforming hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, of bring life to dry bones, and of God finally having a people who would be true to him forever. Jesus is the long-awaited King, the most important King, the ageless King, the true and universal King, the redeeming King and the spirit anointing King.

And that leaves us with one big question: Is he your King? Some of you would say yes, absolutely. Jesus is my King. If that's your answer then that is fantastic, but let me ask this follow up question: does your life show it? If he is the universal King, the ageless King and the true king, if he gave his life for yours and you have accepted his gracious forgiveness then it means that everything in your life needs to be subject to his perfect rule. So is that the case? You may want it to be true; you may long for it to be true, but is it the case?

If there is a gap between your words and your life you've got a wonderful opportunity today as we share in bread and wine together to remind yourself of the redeeming work of Christ and to commit yourself to him afresh. Don't just say Jesus is your King; make sure your life demonstrates it.

But some of you would say no. Jesus is not my King. Some might go further and say you don't recognise that Jesus is the King at all. To you I simply say this; whether you know it or not, whether you recognise him or not, Jesus is the King you have been waiting for. And he stands ready today to offer you his greatest gift; himself. He offers to take your guilt and your sin and to wash you clean. He offers to take the mistakes of the past and give you a brand-new start. He offers to take your struggles and use them both for his glory and for your good. And he offers to give you his Spirit that you might know peace in the present, have hope for the future and a purpose in life that will truly satisfy.

When John pointed to Jesus he pointed to the one who is the Son of God: the long-awaited King, the most important King, the ageless King, the true and universal King, the redeeming King and the Spirit-anointing King. From this day forward, may our hearts and our lives to show that we have recognised him. Amen.